Mobile Phone Culture in Bangkok:

The Expression of Modernity and Cultural Changes

Chuensumon Bunnag

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Abstract

This thesis examines the mobile phone culture in Bangkok, Thailand, and the way mobile phone can be seen to represent an expression of modernity and cultural changes among Thai middle class teenagers at large. The idea of modernity has been explored in terms of Tween and Teen subcultures' incorporation of mobile phones to form and create their cultural identities as cool and modern in different social settings, such as homes, schools and department stores. The material data probes these social interactions in relation to the demographic and psychographic backgrounds of Thai teenagers, who employ cool brands to display their cool selves by using the generations of mobile phones technology to enhance their communicative patterns, blurring the boundaries of public and private spaces. The symbolic meanings of mobile phones i.e. necessity-luxury and fashion as symbols of modernity bring about social and cultural changes, as well as consumerism and leisure activities which can be showed as habitus. It further considered Thai teenagers' social relations alongside advertising representations elaborated issues of modernity to show to their consumption patterns and cultural identities.

My ethnographic data suggests that the distinction Tween (9-14 years old) and Teen (15-18 years old) subcultures, and the university students use mobile phones as symbols of modernity to create their identities are relevant to fashion and social emulation among family and peer in terms of purchases, opinions, and activities. Thai teenagers perceived mobile phones as new of intimacy rather than merely as tools of connectivity, indicating social status and serving as means of seeking pleasure. New identities in terms of *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* subculture are elaborated to show how global interacts with local through their subcultures in ways that they incorporate fashionable mobile phones to form their new identities and deviant behaviours as resistance to traditional norm in Thai society.

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<u>Chapter 1</u>

Mobile Phone Culture in Bangkok:

The Expression of Modernity and Cultural Changes

The Modernity of Mobile Phone Culture

This thesis explores mobile phone culture as an expression of modernity in relation to Thai middle class teenagers in different social and cultural settings in Bangkok, Thailand. It illustrates how 'modern' communicative devices, in particular the mobile phone, have transcended and reframed everyday practices to provide for new forms of identity among the young people in this study (see Appadurai 1996; Chaney 2002a; Rice 2002). The study also examines the concept of globalisation through the local forms of mobile phone use: different periods of mobile phone technology operate in contexts where Thai middle class teenagers display themselves as 'cool' and 'modern'.

I argue for particular new modes of modernity that have been incorporated in Thai teenagers' leisure lifestyles and communicative patterns, including mediated and quasi-mediated interactions, and will show how these modes emerge in various forms (Katz and Aakhus 2002; Thompson 1995). This allows for changes in Thai social norms and social values, which also relate to physical and social transformations of the "city" in Bangkok. The thesis connects displays in the city, images and social interactions by considering the consumption of mobile phones amongst two groups of Thai teenagers, described here as Tweens and Teens[1]. It explores their relationships to brand images and their interactions and experiences vis-à-vis mobile phones as part of a mobile phone sub-culture.

The discussion will examine certain transformations in relation to mobile phone technology, where Thai teenagers interact around cool brands. In terms of using cool brands, this phenomenon can be closely identified with wealth and self-actualisation amongst the peer group. 'Cool' reflects the perception of something as

trendy or the search for things to convey self-identity (Jeff Chu 2003). An analysis of mobile phone interactions in the context of Thai teenagers' leisure and lifestyles alongside the issues of using 'cool' brands will explain why such brands express the cool self. I will make connections in terms of how this is relevant to consumption patterns and overall consumerist tendencies amongst teenagers. Comparisons may be drawn with the notion of brand consumption in the social world within the localisation of global trends and flows (see Appadurai 1996)[2]. The mobile phone is seen as an ideal way by Thai people to socialise Thai middle class teenagers into the "new mode of modernity" and as a sphere mediated by advertising images. Thai teenagers serve as cultural intermediaries who extend new communication technology as the mobile phone intercedes and becomes part of their everyday lives (Haferkamp and Smelser 1992; Lury 1996). By modernity, I mean that Thai teenagers constitute their identities as being cool and modern in the context of cultural changes where they display the high mobile phone technology and using the non-voice services: I will clarify these concepts through my research and by reference to the literature.

The ethnographic data on the Thai middle class teenagers in Bangkok brings out their constructions of their everyday settings vis-à-vis the mobile phone through peer groups, fashion and advertising images. The material is drawn from a range of settings, such as homes, schools and department stores. I make connections between the teenagers' observed behaviour in public places (schools and department stores) and in private settings (homes) to argue for a contrast in the sense that Thai teenagers generate new senses of freedom and new expression of identities in relation to mobile phones in the public places. Meanwhile, they interact with their mobile phones as their 'close friends' to enhance their intimate relationships in their private places. These interactions show how they act out ideas of being cool and modern through the use of the advance technology of mobile phone, as well as how the meanings of mobile phones are embedded in their everyday settings and in transforming communicative patterns (see Miller and Slater 2000).

Various scholars have debated the meanings of mobile phones by looking at such issues as mobility, intimacy, immediacy and instrumentality (Sheryl Han Sze Tjong, Weber and Sternberg 2003; Leung and Wei 2000) or at the mobile phone as a friend, an entertainment device and a symbol of modernity (Fortunati 2002; Shin Dong Kim

2002). Jukka-Pekka Puro (2002) claims that although the mobile phone enhances the "connectivity"[3] between people, it may increase loneliness and may also arouse feelings of being easy-going and open. In this regard, the studies examining power relationships, social networks and actors are drawn from various scholars across disciplines to demonstrate how the mobile phone is incorporated in the mobility and the implications of increasing fluidity in Thai societies (Katz and Aakhus 2002; Horst and Miller 2006). These have been supportive in studying mobile phone as global connectivity that somehow expresses modernity and reflects cultural changes through a modern perspective.

The thesis considers the literature where connectivity is concerned with necessity, luxury and fashion as a symbol of modernity. However, it argues beyond this understanding of the concept by demonstrating the way in which Thai teenagers, who are classified by class, ethnicity and gender, use mobile phones as expression of modernity and as intimate communicative devices in Thai culture. These are associated with symbolic meanings i.e. status symbol, wealth, cool and modern rather than because of the function and necessity of mobile phone use in terms of connectivity.

This thesis is different from various other ethnographies in the sense that it has employed interdisciplinary approaches. It looks at how Tween and Teen subcultures in cultural studies generate their tastes, styles and class distinctions in relation to the representations of mobile phone use in terms of seeking pleasure and searching for identities. The thesis makes a genuine contributions socio-culturally; it benefits significantly from the 'location' and cultural access which reflect upon the twin axes of cultural commentary and deep understanding of the social 'role' and significance of the mobile phone.

This study is believed to be beneficial in that it is specific about changes relevant to genders and values as well as inter-generational, cultural, and religious changes as all these relate to the use and social construction of mobile phones in the specific context of Tween and Teen Thai subcultures. Furthermore, this thesis adopts media anthropology studies to examine everyday lives vis-à-vis mobile phone interaction in the urban Bangkok. As well as this, media communication studies are

used to investigate how mobile phones as domesticated technology are used in households and displayed in public, and how they have emerged in the transformation of new communicative patterns and social interactions.

In examining this, part of the fieldwork approaches in ethnographic research – i.e. participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus groups and semiotic analysis – is applied to gain empirical data through field observation. The combination of such research tools makes it possible to obtain multifaceted data that reflect modernity in relation to mobile phone consumption within the Tween and Teen subcultures in the modern culture. Subsequently, the data obtained can indicate important changes in social norms and cultural values through the symbolic meanings of mobile phones, with which Thai middle class teenagers present themselves as cool and modern.

To work out the symbolic meanings of mobile phones in terms of literature, I draw upon Daniel Miller's (1985) work on material culture. He discusses the material culture as forms of cultural expression and consumption in modern society, generated by human agency. Miller's work amongst south Indian potters demonstrates that artefacts play key roles in framing ritual activities, providing cues that establish the cultural significance of the events taking place. Miller also suggests that this "function" of artefacts may inspire artefact diversity, a key feature of human technology. When many versions of artefacts are available, the importance of their roles in social life can be shown. In this study, the mobile phone may be seen as an electronic material culture, which brings a high degree of symbolic function over and above its connectivity functions (see Lee and Munro 2001). As can be seen, Thai new rich middle class consume the mobile phone as a means of seeking pleasure, along with its symbolic meanings this engenders, such as displaying notions of 'cool' identity, affluence and 'self-actualisation'.

This is relevant to Horst and Miller (2006)'s recent work on mobile phones in Jamaica and the way in which low-income Jamaicans use the cell phone to establish a pattern of extensive rather than intensive networks[4] which they call link-up. Furthermore, link-up usage highlights the importance of understanding the local incorporation of cell phones as well as local forms of networking enacted through new communication technologies. Their study offers insights into class distinctions and the local

interaction of mobile phone use. I draw on this to examine how Thai middle class teenagers as cultural intermediaries have experienced mobile phone use in different local settings in terms of similar distinctions.

The ways in which Thai teenagers interact with mobile phones not only provide for changes to the traditional patterns of social interaction but also carry a cultural meaning and a cultural identity (Katz and Aakhus 2002; Shin Dong Kim 2002). I will propose that Thai teenagers not only enhance their network of social relations by using mobile phones, but also involve themselves with the production of cultural meanings and their identities through advertising and other images in public spaces. Subsequently, these representations of Thai teenagers can be associated with the imagination of self and "brand" consumption in the modern culture. My thesis is that Thai teenagers have encoded and incorporated mobile phones with significances in their everyday lives by pointing to the transformations of mobile phone technology and the meanings of advertising in creating and accommodating different tastes and modern styles in relation to mobile phone consumption in Thai society at large. The perspectives of cultural and social theories, media anthropology and media communication will be employed through an ethnographic approach to form my fundamental theoretical framework. Consequently, the following three hypotheses have been generated:

> 1) For Tweens and Teens in this study, the mobile phone as a particular form of modernity is embedded as a new form of communication and a new meaning of self-identity i.e. wealth, social status, fashion, self-actualisation, chic and high technology. From this perspective, these meanings of 'necessity-luxury' and 'fashion as a symbol of modernity' are articulated by the use of cool mobile phone brands in relation to the demographic data (i.e. age, gender, education and socio-economic status) as well as the psychological data (i.e. taste, choice, preference and attitude) of Thai teenagers. The meanings of the mobile phone are not only constituted by the necessity of communication, but also by fashion and social emulation through advertising images and peer groups (see Veblen 1994).

2) Thai middle class teenagers use cool brands to express a cool self-image linking between status, class and gender and these response to brand and advertising representation and imagery. The image of the mobile phone in TV commercials represents "modernity" using popular cultural forms displayed through brand images and people's everyday experiences with them, which transmit social and cultural changes amongst Thai middle class teenagers. In addition, these factors have brought about the contradiction of social norms and changes to social values in accordance with what appear to be 'core' Thai values of materialism and consumerism[5].

3) The teenagers are key players within the local processes of globalisation in terms of consuming global brands in local settings such as homes, schools and department stores. These settings allow them to cultivate and promote leisure activities and consumer culture through the increased accumulation of styles and tastes of mobile phone use.

Ethnography: ways of seeing culture

Throughout this thesis, I will discuss these hypotheses with data collection perspectives and focus only on middle class areas of a single urban centre, Bangkok. The study also emphasises on Tween (pre-teenagers) and Teen (teenagers) including the university students to show how they act on the basis of shared practices out of habits in the sense that different tastes and choices are made within class-based groupings. All of them have been divided into two groups: participants from 9 to 14 years old are called 'Tweens', and people between 15 and 18 years old are named 'Teens' (Michman et al. 2003). The distinction of age range is related to the education levels in the sense that my research participants who study in the primary and the junior high school are categorised as Tweens; meanwhile, people who study in the senior high school are classified as Teens. Different levels of education indicate different ages which are believed to entail different behaviours between the Teens and the Tweens. That is, the Teens who are older than the Tweens are believed to make a purchasing decision on mobile phones based on their prices and promotions. The Tweens, however, are perceived to merely follow fashion and to display wealth, the notion of which entails the incident that they acquire mobile phones beyond their

means. Hence, the Tweens believe that owning expensive mobile phones is an indicator of their achievement and adulthood. The two groups of Thai teenagers are separated by age and education for two reasons. Firstly, these are the age groups that are most commonly associated with the early adoption of new technologies, in particular the mobile phone. Secondly, differences in age and education exert an influence on how they perceive advertisements in views of relationships between sexes and behaviours in different social and cultural settings. Thus, this education division allows us to be able to see how mobile phones are interpreted within specific types of youth culture and to examine how Thai teenagers have socialised by peer group influences in terms of mobile phone purchasing. Class, gender and education are also taken into account in order to understand Thai teenagers' consumption patterns, leisure and lifestyles in Bangkok. Therefore, the research will show the distinctions between Tweens and Teens on how they use mobile phones to express their personal style and tastes.

I consider Bourdieu's concept of habitus as being related to lifestyles of Thai teenagers and inextricably bound up with the experiences of class and global brands that continually shape individuals' identities. In this context, habitus can be regarded as a system of dispositions embedded in habits – i.e. feelings, thoughts, tastes and bodily postures, which can be studied to illuminate the specific lifestyle of a particular social group (see Bourdieu 1984; Reed-Danahay 2005; Bennett 2005).

To further demonstrate the notion of mobile phone culture, the habitus is embodied or inscribed in the individual's body and practical acts, such as the facial expressions that Thai teenagers use when they talk on their mobile phones, the ways they create SMS and MMS from their mobile phones and their preferences in terms of mobile phone styles. In this way, an individual's habitus is shaped by, or linked to his or her family, peer group and class position. It takes place by means of how habitus is used to make sense of social experiences and as a source for making distinctions in tastes, which can be shaped by the outcome of the interaction of the strategies adopted by different social groups and the inter-space [6] (Lury 1996; Hulme, 2003a). This analysis allows me to relate the notion of active audiences where I argue that Thai teenagers actively engage in their constructions of mobile phone meanings to form their identities as being cool and modern.

Gig culture and Deck Neaw culture: collective expressions of youth

I relate Thai teenagers as active audiences in that they actively engage their interpretations through the advertising representation in order to construct new meanings of mobile phone. These constructions based on their habitus will illustrate through sharing norms and practices to *Gig culture* and *Deck Neaw culture*. These are local terms for collective settings where young people express new identities as being cool and modern in the deviant behaviours which resist Thai traditional culture. In this thesis, I look at these collective expressions in accordance with the mobile phone use.

This further allows an exploration of collective modes of relationships, in particular the *Gig culture* and the *Deck Neaw culture*, local terms for two distinctive sub-cultural settings among Thai middle class teenagers, as I will explain in chapter 6. I examine these sub-cultures by drawing/building on their use in ethnographic work in cultural studies. With an emphasis on Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus, however, this brings out the issue of 'taste', lifestyle distinctions and cultural capital as the important concepts for the analysis of youth culture, through the elaboration of the Tweens and Teens who participate in this study. Subsequently, they become known as *Gig* and *Deck Neaw:* the ongoing construction of sub-cultural identities in Thai modern culture (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003).

The analysis of the changing relationships between youth cultural tastes and lifestyles with ethnographic practice (Muggleton and Weinzierl, ibid) enables me to look at popular music, dressing styles, high technology mobile phones in relation to the form of behaviors in the *Gig* and the *Deck Neaw* sub-cultures. The embodiment of sub-culture literature allows me to look at habitus as cultural activities in Thai teenagers' subculture where I argue that Thai teenagers adopt the mobile phones as a connected part of their identities to fashion the differentiation of lifestyles and leisure activities, especially the *Gig* and *Deck Neaw*. The connection between youth, fashion, technology and style has increasingly been theorised in the more recent literature on youth cultures (Bennett 2000; Muggleton 1997).

In this context, a *Gig* refers to a person who prefers to date several boys/girlfriends at the same time with no sexual commitment. Meanwhile, a *Deck Neaw* refers to a

'modern person' who is crazy about technology, fashion, music and communication. I will conceptualise *Gig and Deck Neaw* in terms of habitus through the emergence of new identities and the activities of young people. These new subcultures are related to their struggle to search for meanings of selves which incorporate mobile phones in their everyday lives and in different social settings (Hulme and Truch 2004).

The ethnographic research allows me to immerse myself in a longitudinal observation of these groups in their domestic settings to examine how habitus frames the localisation and globalisation processes of Thai Tweens and Teens. With such research method in ethnography, I am able to see certain ways that the young people have shared mobile phone experiences in the consumption of cool brands (see Gillespie 1995). The notion of habitus is related to my arguments in terms of class distinction and lifestyle. To illustrate, Thai middle class teenagers use cool mobile phone brands to express a cool self-image i.e. wealth, social status, fashion, self-actualisation, chic and hi-technology. This examination allows for connections between the advertising representation, fashion and brand images and how these images are consumed. They are also investigated in relation to other factors such as the role of the family and peer group.

In this thesis, I look at the mobile phone as a material artefact in relation to issues of private and public spaces (Horst and Miller 2006), landscapes and the description of the manners in which Thai teenagers encode, produce and reproduce, as well as altering and transforming patterns of sociability and communication (see Tilley 2001). In doing so, the way to look at Thai teenagers have social interactions with their mobile phone can be explained in the fieldwork in Bangkok.

Writing Ethnography

By conducting ethnographic research, I encounter Thai teenagers' perceptions, attitudes and actions through the way they use their mobile phones, which are meaningful to them, on their own terms, presenting these observations through *thick description*[7] and empirical data. This allows me to analyse the mobile phone cultures on the basis of intensive and extensive fieldwork in a selected local setting (Gillespie 1995; Machin 2002). Therefore, the process of producing my ethnographic account

begins with the day-by-day writing up of field notes, observations and reflections concerning "the field" (Atkinson 1992). In fieldwork, field notes are a form of representation of the ethnographer's involvement not only in gaining access to and immersing myself in new social settings, but also in producing written accounts and descriptions, which are inevitably selective, as well as bringing a sense of these observed events, persons and places to others (See Emerson, M. R. et al. 2001). Thus, two periods of fieldwork were carried out in Bangkok: the first fieldwork period was conducted from October 2003 to April 2004, and the second period was a follow-up visit in July 2005.

Under the umbrella of the ethnographic approach, I apply both qualitative and quantitative methods to access the empirical data. The participant observation of the Tween and Teen school boy groups in their schools, homes and department stores is supported by 24 qualitative in-depth interviews. Additionally, four different groups[8], also divided according to gender and education, are studied to investigate the interpretation of representations of mobile phones in TV commercials. Furthermore, in terms of qualitative research methods, the semiotic approach[9] has been applied to analyse the content of four TV commercials for mobile phones, which were aired between February and March 2004 across all national TV channels (TV3, TV5, TV7, TV9, TV11 and ITV) in Thailand.

I discuss the images used by advertisers to bring out connections in Thai teenagers' everyday settings and their relationships to place: they adopt the images of hi-tech mobile phone from these advertisements to be their sources of reference about identities. In addition to buying the advertised mobile phones, Thai teenagers use these advertisements to reconfirm their identities as cool and modern to others. I connect the representations from the advertisements with issues of how the young are modern. In this regard, I analyse relevant TV commercials on mobile phones and connect these images with young people's activities in public spaces.

The thesis attempts to show how the images presented in these TV commercials stimulate and intensify expressions of modernity which lead to the negotiation of new cultural identities via the mobile phone (see Gillespie 1995). In effect, I reflect on the ways in which Thai teenagers perceive a sense of modernity through these TV

commercials, and a discussion of how these images are relevant to their imaginations will be grounded in other material from interviews, observations, conversations and focus group materials [10]. In addition, my subjective immersion allows me to observe and obtain other data during the fieldwork.

Research tools in the fieldwork

Furthermore, a survey of 110 participants[11] in educational institutions was conducted in order to connect material aspects of mobile phone behaviours with Thai teenagers' attitudes, preferences and practices in mobile phone use and then to add the data for reference. The survey collected data on how Thai middle class teenagers have social interactions with their mobile phones in terms of using, consuming and acting in their everyday lives. The survey included multiple-choice questions, open-ended questions and questions to rank the attitudes of respondents in terms of their agreement or disagreement with positive and negative statements gathered from the ethnographic data. Additionally, in-depth interviews assisted in the collection of detailed information that the participant observation could not provide.

Berger (2000:125) notes that in-depth interviews "are unique in allowing researchers to get an insight into Thai teenagers' behaviours and to gain access to material of considerable importance". Therefore, a set of questions about the participants' everyday practices, attitudes and values in relation to mobile phones were used in structured interviews that drew upon the literature review. These questions were prepared in note form and organized in time sequences while I was interviewing my research participants. However, semi-structured and unstructured interviewing sometimes generated insightful answers to illuminate the notion of mobile phones being related to Thai teenagers' behaviours (Fetterman 1988), in particular the courting relationship and the expression of cool identities. Subsequently, the observation of mobile phone behaviour in the different social settings was video–recorded and this material was used to provide a short ethnographic film[12] in support of the thesis. Thus, my short ethnographic film in the VCD format, which presents seven themes in cinematic or observational style (see Banks 1992; Pink 2001), is attached at the end of the thesis. This ethnographic film involved with groups of teens

who were students incorporating the mobile phones into their everyday lives and gave me consent to join them in the fieldwork.

Concerned with ethical issues, I followed strict ethical guidelines from British sociological review (British Sociology Association 2002) in carrying out fieldwork which involved children and required particular care. For instance, I started by disclosing my presence to the school authorities, parents and guardians of children, as well as, my research participants to give me consent to conduct my research according to my proposal. With regard to my role as a PhD researcher, it was supportive when I presented my credentials as a student at Cardiff University and a lecturer at Mahanakorn University of Technology, Bangkok. These credentials satisfied parents, school authorities and my research participants with regard to access and trust during my fieldwork. Furthermore, I made known my presence at all times as a researcher by letting my interviewees know of my work and by appearing in my research settings. Therefore, I obtained parental consent in filming and observing my research participants by oral permission when I visited them at home, and by a letter to the head of school when I joined them at school. This permission included my presence with them in the public places such as schools and department stores.

Additionally, I agreed to provide anonymity where necessary and to give the right of withdrawal at any time this was requested. Once consent was provided, I followed this up with both the children and parents, letting them know of how the work was going and where necessary providing assurances that confidentiality would be maintained where necessary. As well as this, I also seek the consent of Tween and Teen groups and try to make them understand the nature of my work. This was re-emphasised when I accompanied them with my video camera in the social settings. This is relevant to Edmonds (2003)'s work on the entitled of Ethnical considerations when conducting Research on Children in the Worst Form of Child Labours in Nepal. He stated that "children who participate in this research have a right to know what they will be involved with during the research and to be told of all the anticipated and possible outcome of the research (Edmonds 2003:4)."

Their attitudes towards me and the way they appeared as natural on my ethnographic film indicate the manner of our interactions and further support my careful ethical

positions: they were comfortable with my presence as a researcher. I also constantly paid close attention and worked on issues of trust: for instance, there were occasions when certain family issues would arise between parents and children. I was treated as one of the family and expected to consider some of these issues as closed and to react as an empathetic person. In treating these instances with care and assuring non-disclosure, I also continued to observe ethical issues and to protect and be careful not only of the children whom I was researching, but also adult participants.

I ensured that my observation did no harm to children who were participating in the research process. The focus on mobile phone behaviours as part of everyday scenes in Thai society did not involves sensitive issues such as drug abuse or child abuse, for instance. Thus, whilst there were no incidents involving such issues which would require related ethical decisions, I nevertheless paid attention to the ways I was present and participated with young people. Here, I endeavoured at all times to conduct myself in a manner that did not constitute harm. The subject of my research - mobile phones – facilitated this approach and my participation in this manner. The credentials I had provided and my emphasis on seeking constant both from parents, guardians, school authorities and the actual participants were also central to this approach. My questions, conversations and participation were devised in a manner to maintain this careful approach, paying attention to confidentiality, rights of withdrawal, and avoidance of harm. My approach extended to withdrawing from a particular group, for instance, when I was not able to establish a rapport and the group did not appear enthusiastic about my research. My presence also had a cultural context where as a Thai I had to appear in the role of a 'sister' - a term which has specific meaning in terms of ensuring the avoidance of harm and treating each with respect. By taking on this role attributed by my participants, I was aided in my ethical approach: this is because my participants expected me to act in a particular way according to their cultural expectations and would have withdrawn from the research if I had acted differently. Thus, their expectations also aided my constant awareness and efforts to maintain a strong ethical approach at all times.

Bangkok: the setting of modernity

An ethnographic study was carried out in several districts in *"Krung Thep"* (Bangkok). The field sites are in the Jatujak and Bung Kum districts. The reason for this is that Bangkok is comprised of fifty districts. Each district has a broad area with a different geographic and demographic background. Therefore, I selected areas of Bangkok by using a purposive technique. Jatujak district and Bung Kum district were chosen as my fieldwork locations because Jatujak is the inner district of Bangkok and is close to the main business centre and government buildings, for example the Sunday Market, Central Ladpraw department store, Sofitel Central Plaza hotel, Bangkok BTS (sky train) and Thailand's Department of Transportation. Meanwhile, Bung Kum is on the outskirts of the city, far from the important business areas. Thus, people who live in Jatujak are perceived as richer than those who live in Bung Kum because most people who live in Jatujak are entrepreneurs. According to the statistics from BMA (Bangkok Metropolis Administration), the total income of Jatujak district is higher than Bung Kum district (www.bma.go.th).

Therefore, my fieldwork in two districts was conducted in three different locations: school, home and department store, where mobile phone interaction occurs for various purposes. These locations provided different stories, which are related to the expression of modernity, mobile phone technologies and brand consumption. I carried out observations with Thai schoolboys and schoolgirls in both public and private secondary schools in Bangkok.

Bangkok was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, conveys the idea of modernity in the sense of modern transportations, new values and new forms of experience and high literacy. Bangkok is perceived as the dominant urban centre in terms of population density, with high levels of migration from four regions (North, East, West and South) and the associated cultural diversity this brings. In sum, it is a location rich in ethnic and religious diversity as distinct from other regions. Secondly, Bangkok, a centre of economic, financial and government institutions, represents the power of telecommunications within a country where mobile communications are much needed among Thai teenagers who live in Bangkok. My material demonstrates how the urban experiences of Thai people and Thai

teenagers are inextricably bound up with the mobile phone as a particular representation of modernity in terms of its symbolic and connectivity functions. Thus, I consider how Thai teenagers bring out the sense of modernity associated with their coolness, wealth and self-actualisation according to the development of mobile phone technologies and also look at how G1-G3, the three generations of mobile phone technologies, have emerged in Bangkok society.

Finally, Tween and Teen lifestyles in Bangkok are illustrative of the cultural market in the context of globalisation and localisation and are associated with social/cultural changes. In this context, the research shows how Tween and Teen uses of the various modes of mobile phone technologies, i.e. picture phones and video phones, have enhanced their communicative patterns and virtual relationships in Bangkok. This point is related to the representation of images, which captures the idea of modernity in terms of presenting a new mode of living and the experience of newness that is associated with mobile phone technology (Thompson 1995; Appadurai 1996). The meanings of the mobile phone, symbolised in terms of advanced technology, modernity and relationship ties through representative images in the city, will be studied. In the next section, I shall outline the theoretical frameworks that have been employed in this study through the insider and outsider perspectives.

Conceptualising the theoretical frameworks

In order to immerse myself in all my data, both insider and outsider perspectives have been taken into account, alongside the relationship of mobile phone culture in Thai society and the people and places that are key factors in the study. The insider perspective is mentioned in terms of being a native embedded to represent Thai culture in positive ways as well as being a member of the research participants' groups, spending time with them in both private and public spaces. Meanwhile, I also adopted the outsider position as a researcher to scrutinise the mobile phone culture in terms of Thai teenagers' social interactions vis-à-vis mobile phones via the ethnographic gaze, for which I need sensitivity of times, places and interactions (Machin 2002).

As a 'native' researcher, my subjective immersion enables me to examine the relationship between fieldworker and subject, as well as the interpretation of the data (Okely 1992). In writing field notes, this provides for an understanding of cultural, social and technological changes in contemporary Thai culture through the eyes of a "native ethnographer" so as to question how these changes influence Thai teenagers vis-à-vis mobile phone use. Therefore, my vantage point as a 'native' researcher who shares common cultural and social norms, social values and a Buddhist religious background with my research participants also makes it necessary for me to adopt certain analytical positions (Khare 1983 and Emerson et. al. 2001).

As regards 'nearness' in Thai society, I am a Thai who speaks Thai as my native language and have a good understanding of Thai customs and manners. I am a full Thai blood as distinct from Sino-Thai and I grew up in a Thai middle class family: my father was a lecturer and my mother was an assistant chief of social community department, in a small province in the north-eastern part of Thailand. In 1989, my family moved to settle in Bangkok. Since then, Bangkok has become another hometown where I studied and have worked for more than fifteen years. In addition, my profession is a university lecturer who has been familiar with teenagers for several years; for example, I joined their activities such as eating, travelling and doing extracurricular activities with them as the supervisor of a drama club. These vantage points allow me the particular kinds of opportunities to examine different events and settings of my research participants and their activities vis-à-vis mobile phones (Shaffir 2001). For this reason, as a 'native' researcher, I am able to learn the hidden and multifaceted aspects of the urban experiences of Thai teenagers and the mobile phone interactions embedded in their everyday lives. My findings in relation to Thai customs and social values, as well as the display of Thai distinctiveness and the local interactions enable me to reassemble the material data back into teenagers' lives according to native milieu (Halstead 2005; Nuntiya Doungphummes 2002). This entails a new understanding of Thai teenagers' subculture and articulates their new identities in relation to mobile phone interactions, described through the *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* culture.

Conversely, meanwhile, I am the 'other' in my research participants' group by virtue of being a researcher in terms of reflecting the field observations and the cultural activities as I participate in them. On the basis of my own knowledge and

assumptions, I was concerned to adopt an outsider's perspective through symbolic interaction[13] to view how Thai teenagers define themselves as cool, chic, modern and high-tech persons. This reflects upon their ideas of modernity that they assimilate through social emulation, fashion and the influence of advertising. Thus, the outsider's perspective allows me to view these behaviours of Thai teenagers analytically.

In this regard, the nuances of 'nearness' and 'otherness' have sharpened my interest in the mobile phone culture in Bangkok since I started to conduct my fieldwork. My attention in this study can be highlighted by several points. Firstly, the Tween and Teen subcultures in Thai society have dramatically changed in relation to global fashion and modern lifestyles. In this sense, puberty, called *Wai Payu Bukaem* (storm and stress) in Thai, is characterised by vulnerable behaviour and emotional sensitivity, with resistance to 'authority' or the parent culture[14] in particular ways. In this context, the *Gig* and *Deak Neaw* culture can noticeably illustrate Thai social and cultural changes in the context of the globalisation. These flesh out the sense of modernity in the sense that Thai teenagers constructing their imagined selves and imagined worlds corresponding to media transformations and new communication technologies as new resources of identities (Thornton 1995; Appadurai 1996). Specifically, as a native ethnographer who also adopts an 'outsider's perspective' through constant questioning of the data and document research, this helps me in looking at the modern lifestyle and leisure orientation, the use of high-technology mobile phones and social changes through global advertising and global brand consumption in local settings that have become important influences on these cultures.

Furthermore, the desire and need for mobile phones is one example of consumerist values in Thai society that I view from both perspectives. Based on my existing knowledge, I want to find out how Thai teenagers change mobile phones following fashion to present a particular idea of being modern. In addition, taking a role of a member in their subcultures, I can look into how and why Thai teenagers use their mobile phones to seek their own identities and to display their particular wealth and high social standing. This is related to a characteristic of Thai culture: Thai people are likely to favour or admire the wealth of other people, in contradiction to the Buddhist path of moderation, which emphasises that people should have humility. These

changes will emerge through the analysis of global brand consumption in terms of people's use of brands to display individuality and a sense of modern style in order to create cool selves. This allows for an understanding of the meanings of the mobile phone as perceived through these Tweens' and Teens' interpretations, which reflect Thai social norms and values.

Some of my fieldwork experiences exemplifying the nearness and otherness are given here to illustrate my analytical insight into the youth expression of modernity. For example, the belief in sacred objects such as *Pra Trimurati*, a miniature of a Hindu God has become a new phenomenon amongst Thai teenagers. They go there in order to pray for their true loves and soul mates. If I had looked at this event through only an insider's perspective, in the sense of becoming part of the religious ritual in terms of paying homage to the replica statue, I might have disregarded the value hidden in this event, because I would have seen it as normal for Thai people to believe in sacred objects.

To develop upon this point, this sacredness is related to the theme of modernity by showing the relationships of appropriate manners in traditional spaces – i.e. *Pra Tirmurati and Pra Prom Erawan* – with the display of modern communication technologies, in this sense the mobile phone. In this context, Thai teenagers use their mobile phones to confirm meeting places and times to go to pay homage in a particular ritualistic setting. However, the way they talk on mobile phones and the way they act out at the traditional ritual places can sometimes be seen as rude in terms of not keeping quiet and not preserving good manners.

Nonetheless, when I look at this event from an outsider's perspective, disregarding my existing knowledge, I find that it can reflect upon certain social values and syncretic[15] culture, being an aspect of the Buddhist religion that is based on a Hindu ritual ceremony. In this setting, I observe that mobile phone interaction not only serves as an aspect of modernity in connecting people to confirm places and appointments, but also provides a channel to present the identity of Thai teenagers. Thus, I will show how the religion and ethnicity of Thai teenagers are embedded in their practices within the modern culture in terms of offering food to monks and

following the Buddhist path alongside the incorporation of mobile phone use, as I will discuss in more detail in **Chapter 2.**

Hence, a six-month fieldwork period plus time in the summer yielded a large body of material on social interactions and observations. My research relationships were formed as I entered the fieldwork via personal connections. My research informants, who were teachers in the sample schools - the St. John School and the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School - helped me to make contact with my research participants, who were their students. After a few months, I was able to become involved with them as a friend, accompanying them to their leisure places and leisure activities. I subsequently kept in touch with them via mobile phone. By texting and sending short messages using their slang words, I was able to reduce the long distance in the relationship between ethnographer and research participants. From this point, our relationships became closer, like sisters and brothers, and my research participants saw me as a familiar person who they could trust.

Seeking to become a member of these groups, I spent my leisure time hanging around in department stores after school or at the weekend, shopping, dining or going to the cinema with my research participants. Furthermore, I joined their school activities, such as the Valentine's Day party at the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School and the St. John Academic Day's at the St. John School, where I could observe their behaviours, their attitudes and their social interactions through mobile phones within peer groups. Thus, friendship reduced the tension in the fieldwork, encouraging my research participants to become familiar and interact with me more intimately as friends (Shaffir 2001). However, building trust in the fieldwork was not an easy task. Some of my research participants did not trust me and were suspicious about my daily presence, and raised questions about why they saw me so often in their schools, particularly the schoolgirl group. For this reason, they sometimes did not give me their correct mobile phone numbers, making it impossible for me to contact them. This can be attributed to competition among members of the same sex and their resistance to interacting with a stranger. Thus, I decided to change my observation group from the schoolgirl group to the schoolboy group, who were rather more content with their awareness of me accompanying them.

Furthermore, document studies in relation to advanced mobile phone technology, marketing, Thai society, and Thai culture were carried out with the purpose of gaining additional material data to relate to the hypotheses and to facilitate the write-up of the ethnography. It allowed me to gather data to understand the different cultural scenes of modern life, particularly in modern settings like homes, schools and department stores in Bangkok. This multi-sited ethnography demonstrates where I discuss the range of cultural differences from different locations (Marcus 1988). This is to reflect a mixture of *Thai-ness* and attempts to be *western* in terms of dressing in global fashions, overtly acting through modern ideas and behaviours such as the *Gig and Deck Neaw*, and incorporating mobile phone technology, such as video phones and Internet phones, into their lifestyles as representations of modernity (See Carrier 1995). Subsequently, this exploration shows how Thai middle class teenagers interact with diverse perspectives of mobile phone displays within their subcultures (see Spradley 1980).

Thai middle class teenagers: Globalisation and localisation

As noted, the thesis discusses how Thai middle class teenagers living in Bangkok experience the global in their local lives, mediated by cultural consumption – in this sense, the mobile phone – as a means of developing shared, collective frames of reference (Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Appadurai 1986; Murphy and Kraidy 2003). The relationship between mobile phone consumption, consumerist values and Thai middle class teenagers in relation to ethnicity, classes (the new rich middle class and the median middle class) and religion, which are key aspects of the modernity approach, will be delineated in **chapter 2**. The reason I bring out the concept of modernity is because it is a word for pervasive changes in Thai society to do with both fashion and wealth, which connotes social movement and social mobility by the middle class (or *Chon Chan Klang* in Thai) as a social force in modernisation (Haferkamp and Smelser 1992). In the past, the middle class led society through their involvement with "the middle-class revolt in 1992" [16]. Now, however, the middle class is seen to be leading society in terms of their consumption patterns and the conspicuous consumption ideology. The lifestyles of the Thai middle-class can be understood with reference to the "social force" in modern consumer culture.

The image of Thai middle class groups is especially evident in the new rich middle class a new social stratum in the middle class group using mobile phones as a major means of marking out and symbolizing or signifying their group identities and lifestyles from that of others. This cultural expression has been examined alongside the construction of the middle class in Thai society from past to present (see Bocock and Thompson 1992 and Ockey 1999). As many researchers have noted, the rapid expansion of new rich middle class groups has increasingly spread out of the *Sakdina* system[17] which has been the root of traditional Thai social structure. Distinct lifestyles were constructed through displays of wealth and by emulating the consumption style of aristocrats and the royal family (Ockey 1999; Van Esterik 2000; Askew 2002). In this sense, the middle class elites engaged in conspicuous consumption[18] by collecting antiques and precious material such as jewellery, ornaments, English books, wines and cigarettes in order to display their distinct tastes for western elements or good tastes (*Rot Niyom* in Thai) and to induce other people admire their wealth. Based on these scenarios, I have found Bourdieu's (1984) concept of the habitus suitable for describing the taste structure of class fractions happening in this context.

To further complicate, the admiration of consumerist values has significantly increased which can be reflected through the mobile phone collections owned by Thai middle class teenagers. In examining this, I will explore how the consumerist value as a way of life and a feature of modernity (see Slater 1997) has infiltrated the culture of Thai middle class teenagers, who are from two distinct ethnicities. They are *Sino–Thai* (Chinese-Thai) and *full Thai blood* (Thai origin). In this context, ethnicity has a bearing on this thesis, as it illustrates the distinction of forms of cultural identity in terms of occupation and class, as well as the cool style and hi-technology of mobile phone use as a representation of modernity (see Gillespie 1995).

My ethnographic material, based on *Sino-Thais* and *full Thai blood* teenagers and the way in which their ethnicity mediates their consumption, can be drawn on the literatures on brand consumption. This is relevant to Halstead's (2002) work in the sense of how the American brand explicates an idea of perfection in an effort to gain a better life. In turn, it also illustrates how East Indian youths in Guyana and New York relate to real and fake brands in respect of marking identity in particular social

settings. Halstead's work views branding as a visible marker of the aspirations of those 'outside' America: it is linked to being modern. This literature allows me to make the connection in terms of the way in which Thai middle class teenagers, especially Sino-Thais, have played an important role in the consumer culture, opening up their experience by consuming global products in Bangkok.

With respect to globalisation, Bangkok as a local site of global interaction has become the centre of consumption and an urban centre for seeking new lifestyles (Askew 2002; Beynon and Dunkerkey 2000), and this will be discussed in **chapter 3**. In this context, I will explore the significance of department stores in Bangkok as sites for the search for identity and the representation of modernity. The flow of information, images, symbols and advertising representations has a tremendous impact on the purchasable 'lifestyle' identities through global products that are now available in local department stores like the *MBK shopping mall* and the *Mall Bangkapi* (Sreberny-Mohammadi 1996; Beynon and Dunkerkey ibid). The images of mobile phone brands, e.g. Nokia, Samsung and Motorola, regarded as global products, can be used to illustrate the way in which Thai teenagers reproduce the global in their daily lives with the sense of how the coolness, modernity and high technology of mobile phone representations are relevant to them. From this view, the way in which the advance of mobile phone technology affects social relationship and enhances the interconnectedness of the global and the local, with the process of time and space distanciation, can be illustrated in the mediation of experience (see Giddens 1991[19], Sreberny-Mohammadi 1996).

Additionally, the boundaries of public and private spheres have been blurred by the way in which private conversations can now take place in public spaces, which Thompson (1995) terms 'the transformation of interaction'. I draw upon this literature by looking at two forms of interactions i.e. mediated and quasi-mediate interactions that have engaged in new communicative patterns of Thai teenagers in relation to the mobile phone use. Those interactions enable me to demonstrate that the mobile phone has facilitated the emergence of a new private-public world, a virtual community that can be pulled together in a matter of moments irrespective of space and time (Habermas 1981; Meyrowitz 1985; Plant 2001).

Modernity and Communication Technology

By and large, as evident in the *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* subcultures, when we take a closer look at modernity[20] – *Khwam Tan* S*amai or Siwilai* in Thai terms – we can see that it contains a sense or an idea of dichotomy between the traditional and the new (Appadurai 1996; Halstead 2005). In Thailand, the transition to modernity has been a continuous development through a process of social and cultural changes since the Thai state nation was modernised by the patriotic elite to preserve the nation from Western colonialism (see Thongchai Winichakul 1994 and Van Esterik 2000). Since then, the 'road to modernity' in Thailand has been paved by developing a Thai national identity and selectively borrowing Western paths to modernity for an idea of progress throughout Thai society[21].

Since *Siam* became *Thailand* in 1939, drastic transformations have occurred through the improvement and development of the country, the influence of capitalism and consumerism, education, the adoption of technologies and the way people live. In particular, the global media have promoted a degree of time-space distanciation enormously (Giddens 1990). This has profoundly influenced the Thai ways of living in projecting the idea of modernity, which is viewed as the prominent success factor of the so-called prosperous West. Generally in Thailand, 'modernity' conveys a sense of convenience, development, newness, the west, luxury, high technology and good education from overseas. My thesis develops the idea of modernity in various contexts by considering how it comes out and also in terms of the introduction of modern communications and modern transportations as part of modernisation, which incorporates with Thai middle class's lifestyles and leisure (Korff 1989; Sumsuk Hinviman 1999; Kritsadarat Wattanasuwan 2000).

Throughout the thesis, I bring out two aspects of individual and cultural changes in relation to the communication technology, as the dynamics of modernity. With respect to individual change, modernity in Giddens' (1990) sense shows a new sense of freedom and new possibilities for the expression of human subjectivity in terms of social interaction. In this regard, I draw on Giddens' (1990) point of view by looking at how modernity in modern social life has been involved with security, danger and trust. Therefore, the relationships between Thai middle class teenagers and their

families and peer groups *vis-à-vis* mobile phones are considered here in terms of the virtual relationships and parasocial interaction. This form can be illustrated by the *Gig* culture in terms of the imagined relationship with someone with just one time dating yet without commitment. This relationship is seen as part of modernity among Thai teenagers.

Alternatively, there are changes in cultural aspects, as Gillespie (1995:4) states: "all cultures are lived and therefore always in flux. All cultures are 'hybrid', 'syncretic', 'creolised' or 'impure'. Then culture, by its very nature, is changing in encounters with others." Accordingly, my ethnography enables me to look at the changes to Thainess in specific settings, arguing that the Thai identity will undergo considerable changes at the hands of modernisation and urbanisation in terms of communication technology, in this sense mobile phone and world media (Sippanondha Ketudat 1990; Wasi 1988; Sulak 1991). Specifically, the attitudes to sexual co-habitation among Thai teenagers, which are related to the contradictions of traditional Thai customs, to fashion and the use of communication technology, in particular the mobile phone and the associated excess expenses, have had a drastic impact upon Thai teenagers' lifestyles (Chalearmpol Som-Inn 2004). My research discusses these social transformations in relation to the *Gig* culture representing changes about Thainess. Moreover, advertising images have also exerted an influence on the mediation of the construction of modernity among Thai teenagers in Thai society by showing how they dress in fashionable styles, wander around in the department stores and talk with mobile phones in hand. However, my focus is to show what people's views are with regard to advertising images that also show those people as 'active audiences'.

In this context, the background of transformation of Bangkok city from the traditional period to the modern era is also depicted in order to show how the cosmopolitan region of Bangkok has been modernised through the globalisation processes and advances in communicative technology, in particular the mobile phone. The research discusses how Thai people create their virtual communicative patterns by using the mobile phone as their representation of modernity. Askew (2002: 33) elaborates on Berman's notion as saying that "I use 'modernisation' here to refer directed change (of which reform is a part). In contrast, 'modernity', as a more multi-sited and diffuse engagement with innovation and new forms, refers to a cultural

orientation beyond immediate direction by the state, even though it may be a broad consequence of state policy. In particular, modernity is associated with the consumption and appropriation of new commodities, objects and symbols, and, to paraphrase Marshall Berman, the attempts by people to become the 'subjects' as well as the 'objects' of modernisation" (Berman 1988:5 cited in Askew 2002).

Furthermore, I explore the historical perspective and the emergence of mobile phone technology since 1986 by the introduction of the Telephone Organization of Thailand (TOT). The first generation of mobile phone can be seen as luxurious technology and unaffordability alongside the fixed-line telephone and household PCT [22] use. For Thai teenagers, these fixed-line telephones and the PCT are perceived as being less cool and lower-tech than the mobile phone in terms of their limited services, less signal coverage, and technological design. The research shows that the factors of fashion and peer group influence entail how Thai teenagers perceive themselves differently to be cool and fashionable according to the adoption of mobile phone technology and its transition from old to new. Additionally, the various generations of mobile phone technology, in terms of 1G, 2G, 2.5G and 3G, are examined in the study of mobile phone use, as presented in chapter 4.

My research seeks to set out this emergence by showing that the mobile phone has become the "new trend" of communication on the move in relation to fashion and high technology, which have influenced the adoption of mobile phones among Thai middle class teenagers as distinct from teenagers elsewhere in terms of ethnicities and habitus. Furthermore, an ability to look after trendy mobile phones shows Thai teenagers' responsibilities to parents in terms of allowing them to upgrade to a higher technology of mobile phones in next time. My research draws on the notion of the social shaping of technology (SST) in order to explain the importance of Thai teenagers' choices and actions, which have active interactivity with mobile phone technology in the modern setting.

The modernity of mobile phone technology

In considering how Thai teenagers interact with technologies and the cultures of these interactions, an aspect of newness contribute insights into how mobile phone technology has been involved in innovation and various political, economic and cultural processes which bring out the social shaping of technology (SST) [23] approach. This approach can provide an understanding of the displaying of mobile phone technology in Thai society (Mackenzie and Wajcman 2002). The research findings discover that Thai middle class teenagers have adopted the subsequent generations of mobile phone technology (i.e. 1G, 2G, 2.5G and 3G) as channels to express their coolness and modernity (Bijker, Hughes and Pinch 1987; Silverstone and Hirsch 1992). Thus, I will discuss why technology does not determine the uses of products (Chaney 2002); on the contrary, technology is secondary to the way in which societies choose to use them (see Winner 2002). Furthermore, the mobile phone represents a new form of expression of Thai teenagers' subjectivity in terms of a novel form of social interaction via the latest modes of mobile phone technology (i.e. the picture phone and the video phone), a new or changing freedom of action, and a new relationship between individuals and the collective, all of which will be illustrated in **chapter 4**.

In 1986, mobile phones were first introduced. Because of the extremely expensive handsets, the mobile phone was perceived as a social status symbol and a mark of modernity that signified wealth and success. Focusing upon this point, it generates a juxtaposition of 'necessity and luxury' and the related issue of 'fashion as a symbol of modernity' among Thai middle class teenagers, which will be grounded in **chapter 5**. In particular, mobile phone consumption in Bangkok can also be seen as a form of social emulation and social competition. This further comes out in terms of how they endeavour to gain status. This setting is very much marked by wealth distinctions which are subsequently picked by in advertising campaigns. Thus, Thai teenagers interact with the mobile phone alongside the advertising campaigns, which influence the way in which they buy 'luxurious' mobile phones. With such influence of the advertisement, the mobile phones are at first seen merely as 'decencies' not 'necessities' (McKendrick et al. 1982; Campbell 1987).

To constitute various meanings of mobile phones, the research will show that for Thai teenagers, mobile phones connote modern, cool and fashionable communicative devices. Meanwhile, the meanings of the mobile phone for parents sometimes signify a "throwaway" technology. In this sense, old or outdated mobile phone handsets will be accumulated as throwaway technology that is useless and worthless because it is out of fashion. The research shows that in Thai society, Tweens and Teens use the fashion and high technological aspect of mobile phones as an adjunct to their new lifestyles and identities, particularly in the *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* displays.

Tween and Teen Subculture: *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* culture

As a culture of a society consists of habits of its people and the way they generally behave, youth culture can be defined as 'a way of life shared by young people'. As Frith (1984:8) puts it, "youth culture can describe the particular pattern of beliefs, values, symbols and activities that a group of young people are seen to share". In this sense, subculture refers to the expressive forms and rituals of those subordinate groups (Genet 1966 cited in Hebdige ibid). To illustrate, youth subculture can be explicated in popular culture, especially in music and fashion, which is also seen as a major feature of youth subculture in this regard (Kidd 2002).

Before we move on to discuss the subcultures of Thai youth, I would like to point out the difference between the Tweens and Teens as my research participants. The reason for the need to distinguish these groups in the Thai context is that Thai Teens lead their lives in conscientious ways in selecting commodities. That is, when compared with the Tweens, they are more concerned with economical values of what they are about to buy. The present generation of Thai Tweens, on the other hands, are criticised by many educators and anthropologists to be raised improperly by their working parents who support them mainly with money. This gives rise to the notion that Thai Tweens tend to spend money with no conscience of worthiness, simply following fashion and the influence of mass media (Chalearmpol Som-Inn 2004; Kritsadarat Wattanasuwan 2000). Consequently, the investigation will be made in terms of how these two groups of the young transcend and reframe everyday practices, collective cultural identities, social interaction, expression and new forms of identity (i.e. Rap, Hip Hop and Rave), specifically in the *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* which

are new subcultures of Thai teenagers in the 21st century. Various Thai scholars conducting research into Thai youth culture have noted that the new social form of Thai youth culture has been transformed by the "western culture" and the impact of new technology. This research will illustrate how understandings of western and Thai cultures coalesce through *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* culture in order to present the expression of modernity in terms of fashion and technology; this will be investigated in **chapter 6**.

The meanings of having *Gigs* can be elaborated to yield positive and negative impacts on Thai society. The positive meaning can refer to coolness among Thai teenagers and efforts to show themselves as popular and attractive amongst their peer groups. The negative meaning refers to someone who is having affairs with other people. In this regard, having a "*Gig*" signifies resistance to traditional Thai customs in terms of breaking the good family values such as having a single mind in sexual relationship.

Meanwhile, the "*Deck Neaw*" culture comes from the English word "trend", which can be translated into Thai as *Neaw*, while "*Deck*" means teens or children. Therefore, *Deck Neaw* people can be found in the age range of 12-22 years old. The culture of *Deck Neaw* in Thai context is characterised by a craze in hi-technology expressed through such behaviours as listening to Indy music, using hi-technology on the move and hanging around in Siam Square, Thanon Kao San road and the Sunday market (J.J). In addition, the *Deck Neaw* dress code favours second-hand clothes from western countries such as the USA, the UK or Europe. It can be demonstrated that these cultures express young people's resistance to authority through a visual style, which encompasses clothes, accessories and technological belongings (see Hebdige 1979).

Therefore, this research aims to illustrate how these new subcultures, especially the *Deck Neaw* culture, establish new trends and generate new looks and sounds, which feed the trends back into the mainstream market. With the same respect, the mobile phone brand names offer different kinds of functions or innovations to serve teenagers' various lifestyles (see Thornton 1995). Therefore, the research will show the distinctions between Tweens and Teens use of mobile phones to express their

personal styles and tastes. This perception helps me to analyse my material in terms of Teens' and Tweens' use of the features of mobile phones, such as the picture function, as attractive devices to secure attention from the opposite sex. In essence, they consider mobile phones to symbolise the idea of modernity. Subsequently, it is associated with the social norms and values that shape mobile phone choices and uses, which will also be examined through the leisure and lifestyle of the Tween and Teen subcultures (Chaney 1996; Lury 1996; Wynne 1998). In this section, I have outlined the characteristics and personalities of my subjects to be investigated. The next section will then describe how they live their lives and how they project themselves in the contemporary world of modernity.

The habitus – Leisure and lifestyle

Starting from the assumption that lifestyles are features of modernity and a part of the everyday social life of modern world, I shall draw upon various scholars to consider how lifestyles emerge as complex processes of self-presentation and social differentiation in modern society (Martin 2003). Additionally, I will examine how lifestyles are routinised practices in terms of incorporating habits of dressing, eating, consuming and modes of acting in encounters with others which show the tastes and class distinction (Giddens 1991). I shall bring out the connection of lifestyle and habitus to look at how Tween and Teen's subculture maintain their own activities and lifestyle patterns within social practices (Hulme 2003a). This refers to the ways in which "people seek to display their individuality and their sense of style through the choice of a particular range of goods and their subsequent customizing or personalizing of these goods (Lury 1996:80)."

Based on the literature, I shall make connections between lifestyles as a way of life and the everyday practice of consumption, concerned with self-identity in terms of individuals' struggles to improve their social positions by manipulating the cultural representation of their situations in the social field. By doing so, I discuss lifestyles in terms of choice, attitude, taste and the leisure activities of Tween and Teen subcultures in relation to mobile phone in particular Thai contexts (Chaney 1996). Tweens' and Teens' leisure lifestyle accounts, relating to their social experiences of

mobile phones, are investigated in this thesis in order to show how individuals' tastes and styles are shaped by social patterns.

My thesis shows how all this is inter-related to the lifestyles of the Tweens and Teens in choosing certain commodities – in this case, cool brands of mobile phone – in association with influences from their peer groups and families, who outline social norms and values for them (Bennett 2003 and Chaney 1996). Many studies of young people's leisure activities have highlighted that the various leisure lifestyles are associated with gender and class distinction (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Hendry et al. 1993). It has been observed that most Tweens and Teens spend their leisure time playing with mobile phones as electronic toys, for example downloading ring tones and music, playing games and chatting with friends.

In addition to this, **Chapter 7** will also underline the impact generated by talking on mobile phones, which replaces other common leisure activities in the family, such as watching TV, chatting and dining. Furthermore, window-shopping for cool brands, one of the most popular leisure activities outside the home, demonstrates the notion of fashion-based consumption. That is, the consumption does not occur in response to their needs for the products, but rather is due to an adoption of particular styles and tastes of mobile phone.

In this thesis, 'cool' is more broadly defined; nonetheless, it is relevant to the cultural commodities and cultural identities that are identified, characterized and served by each style within the group through the associated design and fashion of the mobile phone (Schofield 2000). The term 'cool' reflects the local term *"Theh"* in Thai, which is described to convey modern styles to others. Thus, the cool culture at school, where social interaction and leisure activities centre around cool brands, which shape young people's values and attitudes, will be examined in **chapter 7**.

Cool Culture: Why cool brands express the cool self

The data brings out the relationship between youth cultural products and branding in terms of the construction of identity. This further shows the notion of the mobile phone as a symbol of the transition to modernity in terms of the idea that cool brands

explicate symbolic meanings – i.e. hi-technology, wealth and actualisation in the localities of Bangkok. This idea allows for different emphases on 'ethnicity' and 'culture' linked to ideas of tradition and modernity through specific local-global encounters (Halstead 2002). This interaction has become an important part of Thai teenagers' self-formations in terms of using cool brands to express their self-identities within the modern lifestyle. Thus, this thesis will show that brand images are problematic amongst Thai middle class teenagers in terms of choosing cool brands of mobile phone. For Thai teenagers, the cool brands of mobile phones are purchased to match their modern identities in terms of self-actualisation, affluence and trendiness, as well as self-confidence.

According to the main three hypotheses of this study, I attempt to show that the flow of an idea of 'modernity' has reframed Thai teenagers' self representation in modern settings, such as the home, school and department store, in relation to the use of cool brands of mobile phone. In examining this, **Chapter 7** will examine the activities of Tweens and Teens in schools, describing the symbolic interaction expressed in terms of using cool brands as a way of seeking pleasure. This interaction creates social competition and manipulation of social emulations amongst peer groups who are totally different depending on their school types (e.g. private and public schools). In essence, it aims at exploring the cool culture (as I term it), which refers to a culture of brands that carry meanings and particular forms of imagination into Thai middle class teenagers' minds (Ukritwiriya 2005).

To illustrate, brands' 'social lives' (Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Appadurai 1990) have been addressed here in order to display the relationship of social group networks and mobile phone brand networks among Thai teenagers in searching for identity and seeking pleasure through mobile phone consumption as part of modernity. In this context, the mobile phone network operators have become places where young people show closed group territories for brand images and the construction of social belonging to a group that share the same values and the same social points of reference (Claire Lobet-Maris 2003). This is relevant to the overall theme that Thai teenagers choose their cool networks with regard to peer group interactions to compete with each other. Thus, the images of different mobile phone networks will be

generated through peer influences associated with particular models from different manufacturers.

Therefore, "brand talks and gossip through mobile phone" will be studied in **chapter 7.** This provides an understanding of the gender activity and lifestyles that Thai teenagers have generated through their mobile phone talks in reconfirming their self-identity as cool and modern to friends relating with the brand images. In addition, gossiping through mobile phones brings about the degrees of closeness and a way of communicating activities among peer relations. Therefore, the following section will consider how the differentiation of focus group analysis in terms of age, class, education, gender and income variations reflect various aspects of mobile phone culture, in particular those that permeate Thai teenagers' modern way of life.

The Expression of modernity through TV Ads Talks

My research participants were asked to reflect their ideas regarding four mobile phone TV commercials i.e. 'The Calling Melody': GSM Evolution, 'The Marathon Calling': GSM 1800, 'The quality of the network': AIS and 'Happy birthday 50 baht top up card': Happy Dprompt by DTAC. Through these ads, the study aims to examine how advertising images promote the sense of modernity by virtue of how Thai teenagers interpret their identities and the idea of modernity that fit into the mobile phone experiences in their everyday lives. My research suggests that Thai teenagers emulate advertising representations that present creative ideas that are associated with their imaginations of the ideal way of living. These representations become symbolic resources that reflect the idea of modernity through an interpretative process used by individuals in dealing with the things they encounter, such as advertising representations and brand images (see Blumer 1969a). This paradigm integrates with my theoretical approach where I argue that Thai teenagers express their cool selves related to the mobile phone advertising representations as symbolic resources of identity.

Seen in this light, Thai teenagers accommodate their mobile phones use with modern lifestyles alongside advertising representations that present the latest hi-technology models in relation to promises of an enhanced quality of life. To elaborate, Thai

teenagers project themselves as cool and modern in relation to mobile phone use and symbolic interactions, which shape the social and cultural norms in their everyday practices (Mead 1934; Cooley 1964; Blumer 1969b). In this respect, the interaction of Thai teenagers with advertising representations will be discussed through the focus group analysis.

Consequently, I will examine how they incorporate the settings of modernity (Bignell 2002; Lacey 1998, Dyer 1982; Williamson 1978) – i.e. meanings from the signs, symbols and images of advertising – as well as pleasures, into their everyday mobile phone experiences and images of modernity. These images "are generated in semiotic encounters between a text and a reader, and the significance that reception practices themselves have in everyday locations" (Moores 2000:27). The research demonstrates that Thai teenagers' interpretations of the idea of modernity alongside their encoding and decoding processes are associated with their different social backgrounds and social situations. Thus, the focus group analysis with participants of different ages, sexes and educations is used to illuminate this issue so as to examine how Thai teenagers interpret the expression of modernity through advertising discourse and then how they use this advertising as a frame of reference in relation to the construction of cool identity when they purchase cool brands.

Conclusion

In this introduction, my central argument has been outlined on the interactions of Thai middle class teenagers, who perceive mobile phones as a representation of 'modernity' to provide for their new changing form of communicative patterns and relationships in different social and cultural settings in Bangkok. My ethnography will consider Tween and Teen subcultures: schoolboys and schoolgirls in private and public schools who bring about Thai cultural changes in different ways. In this context, the meanings of mobile phones as symbolic functions rather than tools of connectivity are varied between the Tween and Teen subcultures, with different purposes.

The argument has been discussed in terms of three key points in relation to expressions of modernity. The image of the mobile phone in TV commercials

represents modernity through popular cultural forms displayed through brand images and people's everyday experiences with these images, which transmit social and cultural changes amongst Thai middle class teenagers. This is related to advertising representations, fashion and brand images, as well as family and peer group influences. All these factors have played key roles amongst Thai teenagers, who act as cultural intermediaries within the local process of globalisation, entailing the display of particular ideas of modernity in using the mobile phone in private and public settings.

The next chapter will discuss how variations of class (i.e. the new rich middle class and the median middle class) and ethnicity (i.e. Sino-Thai and full Thai blood) among Thai middle-class teenagers influence their mobile phone consumption. The chapter will show how consumerist tendencies have played a significant part in the transformation of modernity in the consumer culture.

Notes

[1] The term 'Tween' refers to pre-teens who are 9-14 years old and study in the primary school to the junior high school. Meanwhile, the term 'Teen' signifies teenagers who are 15-18 years old and study in the senior high school.

[2] Appadurai (1996) argues that the world people live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life. For him, imagination as a social practice is a key component of the new global order. The consumption of global electronic media provides resources for self-imagining in such a way that people deploy their imaginations in the practice of their everyday lives. It aspires to create persons who would, after the fact, have wished to become modern.

[3] The term of 'connectivity' has become incorporated with numerous technologies and has been involved with the creation of networks between personal computers and other devices such as printers and modems, and with other networks such as satellite systems (Heartly 2002:35). I consider connectivity in the sense that people use mobile phones to call and send text messages and pictures to each other in various networks.

[4] The extensive network refers to the church relationship, the sexual relationship and the kinship relationship. Meanwhile, the intensive network refers to family relationships.

[5] According to de Mooij (2004), "materialism is described as an attitude toward consumption, an enduring belief in the desirability of acquiring and possessing things. Materialism is also a competitive striving to have more than others. Possessions make people happy and things are more valued than people" (2004:118). Meanwhile, consumerism is the cultural expression and manifestation of the apparently ubiquitous act of consumption (Miles 1998:4).

[6] I draw upon Humle's (2003a) examination of mobile phone activities relating to behaviours of individuals and groups in the inter-space (the space between two separate but related events), which can be both conscious and unconscious space regarding Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus and field. (http://www.csmtc.co.uk/pieces/Interspace_p.pdf).

[7] The thick description is one phrase to emphasise description/details as central to ethnography, as Geertz (1973, 1979) refers to a complex whole formed by the interaction of various social relations and processes, which may be described as 'culture' (Gillespie 1995:54).

[8] I conducted the focus group discussion as an additional method during my fieldwork in Bangkok. My focus group participants were male and female high school students from the public school, Bangkapi Sukhum Navapan School, while others were university students. They were selected by purposive sampling and the snowball technique.

[9] I adopt the semiotic approach in terms of qualitative research to analyse the modern advertising because it can highlight the way in which consumers can take part in the creation of meaning in messages. Furthermore, they can also participate in creating signs and codes by themselves, which are relevant to the frame of the referent system (Leiss,W. et al. 1986).

[10] The objectives of focus group are divided into four main parts. The first is to get demographic and psychographic data, as well as information on lifestyle patterns, leisure and hobbies in everyday lives. Secondly, I set out the issues of mobile phone behaviour and experiences. Therefore, I asked everyone to introduce their mobile phone behaviour, such as when they used their first mobile phones and how many mobile phones they owned. These details may provide insights into mobile phone consumption and how users create meanings from their mobile phones. The third part investigates media exposure, the style or appeal of popular TV commercials. These data may provide information on media consumption and habits, as well as general attitudes towards TV commercials. The last part is to examine the interpretation of four mobile phone TV commercials. This illustrates how each group interprets/decodes the messages from TV commercials in a particular way.

[11] The objectives of the questionnaire were divided into three parts: demographic data, mobile phone behaviour and attitudes, and exposure to TV commercials. I conducted these questionnaires with Thai teenagers who were aged from 8 to 22 years old, and these questionnaires were also applied to the focus group.

[12] An ethnographic film is a kind of film that its makers or viewers use for the study, description, or presentation of people and culture. Some researchers have begun to explore reflexive use of video in ethnography, not simply to record 'data', but as media through which ethnographic knowledge is created. According to this, I build upon on this literature to use ethnographic film as a representation of mobile phone culture or information of ethnographic interest, which becomes one part of my fieldwork.

[13] I draw upon Blumer's (1969b:2) concept of symbolic interaction: the way in which people act on things in terms of the meanings things have for them. Thus, I look firstly at how Thai teenagers act towards their mobile phones on the basis of the meanings that mobile phones have for them. Secondly, I examine how the meanings of mobile phones are derived from, or arise out of, the social interaction that an individual has with the family and peer group (Blumer 1969b:153).

[14] Within a dominant culture, individuals' lifestyles are largely based on their social class. Thus everyone has what is called a 'parent culture' – a class-based culture from which different groups are given limited choices within the structural forces that control society (Kidd 2002:121).

[15] The term 'syncretic culture' refers to the fact that all cultures are 'hybrid', 'creolised' or 'impure' and are changing in encounters with 'others' (Gillespie 1995:4).

[16] In the past, the mobile phone was not only a status symbol but was also involved with the Thai political revolution in May 1992 (the so-called 'middle-class' revolt). This implies that mobile phones have been implicated with the social movement in Thai society.

[17] *Sakdina* refers to a system of feudal ranking based on the amount of rice, land and manpower under one's control (Van Esterik 2000).

[18] As Veblen (1994) observes, in modern industrial society, the ruling classes no longer display their superiority by the absence of work, but by means of conspicuous consumption. Put more simply, people spend a lot of money intentionally so that other people will notice and admire them for their wealth as a marking of status.

[19] As Giddens (1991) argues, the time-space distanciation process gives rise to new connections between global developments and the localised settings of daily life, and these linkages may be extremely disturbing. Instantaneous access to far-away places has contributed to a radical alteration in our experiences of space and time, of presence and absence. TV and radio provide technological means by which an 'intrusion of distant events into everyday consciousness' (Giddens 1991:27) is possible.

[20] The ideational origin of modernisation can be traced back to the "idea of progress". Modernisation would mean that a certain indigenous cultural element of the traditional East is replaced by the penetrating Western element and the functional role of the former is taken over by the latter (Hirai Naofusa 1983).

[21] In the period of Prime Minister Phibun Songkram (1938-1944), the building of Thai national identity was represented though the national anthem, performance arts such as *Ramwong* and Thai greetings such as *Wai,* in accordance with the customs of western countries – that is, the handshake – and the wearing of new fashionable suits rather than traditional clothes like *Chongkraben* (draped pants). These examples suggest that the Thai identity does not merely accept and transform Western influences, but wisely adapts and reconstructs its own forms and identities in local patterns of use or domestic spaces.

[22] PCT stands for Personal Communication Telephone, a mobile telephone network linked to the fixed-line telephones in households. In terms of using PCT, people can dial the same number as the fixed line, but they have to press option 1 to connect to the PCT and option 0 for the home telephone.

[23] In contrast to traditional approaches such as technological determinism, which only address the outcomes or "impacts" of technological change, this thesis adopts the social shaping of technology as the major standpoint by showing that technology is a social product which is "socially shaped" or patterned by the conditions of its creation and use in particular social groups (Williams and Edge 1996).

Chapter 2

Articulating Thai middle class teenagers in Consumerism

This chapter looks at the Thai middle class teenagers who participated in this study as key players within the local process of globalisation in Bangkok's modern consumer culture. These teenagers serve as cultural intermediaries in expending the new experience of the globalisation. This is where they consume global brands, in particular mobile phones, and play with modernity in different cultural settings (Appadurai 1996). This chapter will first discuss the teenagers, who are sub-divided into two groups: the new rich middle class and the median middle class. I discuss these sub-groups in terms of the connection of parent cultivation and consumerist values.

Building upon this point, my research looks at how the emergence of the Thai middle class (or *Chon Chan Klang* in Thai), especially the new rich middle class, from past to present, have led Thai society via consumption patterns and the conspicuous consumption ideology. This is defined by the consumptions of modern high-technology goods such as cars, mobile phones, residences in new housing estates and the purchase of sumptuous imported goods from department stores (Pinches 1999). In this respect, I argue that the consumerist values of Thai middle-class consumers have played an important role in the formation of identities based on prestige and modern lifestyles.

The participants in my research, who are varied in terms of classes (the new rich middle class and the median middle class) [1] and ethnicities, are drawn from the middle class in Bangkok. Here, the differences between Sino-Thais (Chinese-Thai) and Full Thai blood ethnicities will be discussed to show their relevance to the construction of social status and self-identity in the context of consumerism. Sino-Thais who come from the new rich middle class are generally perceived locally as richer than those with full Thai blood. They express their modernity by using "cool mobile phone brands" to present to others what is generally understood to be modern style and good taste (*Rot Niyom* in Thai). Meanwhile, the full Thai bloods, who mostly come from

the median middle class, are perceived as being of lower status with lower incomes. One of the ways to balance their social standings is that they follow the conspicuous consumption patterns of the Sino-Thais by using or acquiring the same models of mobile phones. With this respect, the ownership of a mobile phone as a means to seek pleasure is examined to explore these interactions in terms of the distinctions between different classes and ethnicities, Sino-Thais and Full Thai bloods.

The first section of this chapter aims to show how Sino-Thai middle class teenagers, who are the new rich middle class offspring, have socialised and transcended the consumerist values cultivated by their parents. On the other hand, full-Thai blood middle class teenagers' negotiation of this matter through emulating the new middle class's tastes and their search for cool identities will be explored in this regard. This behaviour can be related to the idea of *"Buy now, Pay later"* which shows the way in which Thai middle class people have negotiated with the pursuit of modernity. To explore this phenomenon, I shall begin by considering why consumption is significant to Thai middle class teenagers, their families and their peer groups. I illustrate how consumerism has changed ways of living as well as examine its impact on everyday experience and the consuming experience in local interaction (Gottdiener 2000; Miles 1998).

Building on this point, the mobile phone consumption of Thai middle class teenagers illustrates how they share their experiences, meanings, ways of thinking and acting, and the ideology of consumerism through mobile phones. This allows me to highlight how consumerism offers Thai teenagers the illusion of consumer freedom in the sense that Thai teenagers are not offered only the models of mobile phones they need but also the models of mobile phones they desire by advertising representations. This provides for 'wants' and 'desires', which actively and simultaneously become 'needs' (Miles ibid). This is related to the interaction between the personal appeal and the ideological power of consumerism in cultural transformations in the context of modernity in Bangkok.

In this respect, these transformations form part of their consumption patterns and connect with modernity. In the second section, I will point out the connection between cultural transformations and syncretic religion that arises through activities of Thai

middle class teenagers in order to show how these understandings of modernity provide for particular understandings of the Bangkok setting and the religious setting. As various scholars have remarked, Bangkok has become an important locale of Thailand. That is, it is a key site for the formation and expression of a "modern" society, where emerging identity discourses and various cultural visions of modernity are both actively reconstituting an urban space (Goh Beng Lan 2002) and implicating many changes (Askew 1994).

Thus, the local use of mobile phone for interaction has been examined in certain cultural context; for example, at shrines of *Pra Prom Erawan* and *Pra Trimurati*, the statues of two Hindu Gods, representing a syncretic religion [2] that forms the basis of the Buddhist beliefs among Thai middle class teenagers. The research demonstrates a contrastive scenario at these traditional, holy places. That is, with the shrines in the background, they, though being there as worshippers, use mobile phones not only to get connected with their friends and to confirm their meeting points but also to present their identities through the cool brands of their phones used during their social interactions. The significant use of mobile phones at such holy places is distinct from other settings in Bangkok in a way in which the image of 'old' culture through traditional beliefs is paradoxically tied up to 'new' technology: in this sense the mobile phone as a representation of modernity – being cool and modern. To elaborate, they use their 'traditions of religion' and their presence in religious settings to express 'new selves' through the high technology of the mobile phone. Therefore, this chapter combines discussions of modernity and religious ritual to show how particular ethnicities are mapped in relation to social and cultural changes.

2.1) Mapping out Thai middle class teenagers

The discussion of Thai middle class teenagers and the key roles they play in the context of modernity based on mobile phone use must firstly explore their localisation of this global technology via their interactions with mobile phones. Secondly, their middle class approaches of consumerism are relevant to tastes and preferences, as expressed through their patterns of consuming global brands. This is demonstrated based particularly on mobile phone use. It is therefore important to outline the demographic (i.e. age, gender, class and education) and psychographic (i.e. taste,

preference and attitude) backgrounds of Thai middle class teenagers. In this regard, I conducted a fieldwork with two groups of Thai middle class teenagers who are classified by their school types (either a private or a public school), which signify social classes in Thai society.

The first group consists of Teen schoolboys in the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapan School, a public school whose students come mostly from the median and lower middle classes. My research participants of this group, who I met twice a week from December 2003 to April 2004, are Hiran Techaprathumvong (Vee), Akrathoth Pimolchiyakit (Mo), from the median middle class, and Vutinun Seritaweekul (Golf), who comes from the new rich middle class. They were 17-year-old senior secondary school students and were asked for permission to use their real names here. They were a group of close friends who always engaged in extracurricular activities in school (e.g. sport days and Valentine's Day) and leisure activities outside school (e.g. shopping, eating and hanging out) together. Therefore, it was convenient and accessible for me to develop relationships with these participants so as to observe their interactions within their group through their mobile phones in different social settings.

To take an example, Golf, a Sino-Thai member of the new rich middle class, is a technological leader within the group because he is perceived as richer than the others, as denoted by the relatively frequent change of his mobile phones to follow fashion and technology. Golf's father runs a car business (a representative of Mercedes-Benz) and his mother also runs her own business. Therefore, his parents can afford his taste and style. Meanwhile, Mo and Vee, the members of the median middle class, perceive themselves as *Khon Tammada* (ordinary people) or *Khon Tid Din* (moderate people) in that they are neither rich nor poor. This can be seen from their tastes and lifestyles; for example, they dress themselves without luxury brand names and use normal mobile phone models (without colour screens and digital cameras). In other words, they are rather "*economical individuals*" or *Khon Matayad* in Thai terms. The term "*economical individuals*" or *Khon Madtayad* represents the idea of economic self-sufficiency in terms of considering function and necessity rather than luxury. This idea has been socialised and cultivated by their parents.

As I observe, although their parents have means to buy things for them, Mo and Vee are not spoiled with luxury items. As a matter of fact, Mo's father works as a government officer and Mo's mother is a senior accountant in a company. Meanwhile, Vee's father runs a house construction business and Vee's mother is a housewife. From their careers, it seems to me that they can afford luxurious items for their children if they want to. To take both examples, Vee and his father had an argument one evening when Vee asked for a cool and fashionable mobile phone to replace his current one. However, Vee was not successful because his father commented that his current mobile phone was still functional. In the same way, Mo had tried to persuade his mother several times by showing her how the Nokia Engage had more and better functions than his current mobile phone, a Nokia 3321. However, his mother did not agree with him. In this light, although Mo and Vee are *economical people*, they long for new mobile phones which can be seen as representations of modernity in terms of appearing cool and modern amongst their peer group. This is therefore relevant to the quest for modernity associated with brand names in Thai society. This indicates that the nuances of necessity and luxury are problematic for Thai teenagers in relation to mobile phone use, as will be discussed in chapter 5.

In comparison, the second group is made up of Tween schoolboys from the St. John School. Some of them are offspring of the new rich middle class and the upper middle class that are known in Thai as *Khon Hi So* (High society person). Varote Kongpoemkosol (Tabb), Kansorn Lomvongphisan (Binn), Pisit Dechanchiyusth (Tarr) and Surawat Tengjeeravong (Mon), 14-year-old junior secondary students, are also asked for permission to use their real names. They are a group of friends from the same classroom. Most of their parents own international businesses and work as executive managerial administrators in banks or trading and famous overseas companies in Bangkok. Tabb, Binn, Tarr and Mon's houses are located in the luxury *Mubanchatsan* (housing estate) in Ladpraw district, Jatjujak district and Ratcha Pisek district. Nichada Thani and Laddawan are the names of famous luxury *Mubanchatsan*s in Bangkok where some of them are living. These estates create the environment of western housing estates[3] with California Villa style and are surrounded with gardens and palm trees; in addition, they are protected by security guards. This can be regarded as an example of conspicuous consumption in terms of being dominated by lifestyle images of the affluent West (Pinches ibid; Askew ibid).

As noted, Thai people are quickly able to distinguish one another's socio-economic backgrounds. In assessing a person's socio-economic status, people will instinctively notice others' physical appearances, clothes, grooming, demeanour and way of speaking, as well as material possessions (O'sullivan and Songphorn Tajaroensuk 1997). In this context, my research adopts this idea to identify which class Thai teenagers come from by noticing their socio-economic status from the locations of their homes and what type of houses they live in. In Bangkok, there are different levels of *Mubanchatsan* or housing estates according to socio-economic status. For example, the *Mubanchatsan* of the upper middle class typically offer luxurious and exclusive housing including clubhouses, gardens, swimming pools bounded by security checkpoints and high walls (Askew ibid). On the contrary, in the middle class *Mubanchatsan*, houses are divided by shared walls with neighbours, and their area varies from 16 square metres to 25 square metres. Some *Mubanchatsans* have small playgrounds and common public areas while others do not.

For instance, Mo and Vee's houses are townhouses with two and three storeys at 18 and 25 square metres, respectively. They are located in *Mubanchatsans* in Bungkum district, which is not an important area for the business. In contrast, Golf lives in a modern room with an en-suite bathroom in his father's warehouse located on nearby Navamin Road, a blooming business area. However, the area where Mo and Vee live is perceived as a location for the median middle class rather than for the new rich middle class like that of Tabb's group. The term "median middle class" is used for my research participants who are perceived as having moderate incomes.

I met Tabb's group through the snowballing technique [4] in which friends introduced other friends. From January 2004 to the end of March 2004, I met their group once a week. However, at the first meeting, I observed that their mobile phones played a significant role in presenting their cool identities as well as in showing their being wealthy, fashionable and hi-technology people. To discuss more specifically, mobile phones are as important as their ornamental decorations such as watches and wallets. This is particularly true for Tabb, who is a class leader and a hi-technology person. He uses the most expensive model of mobile phone, a Sony Ericsson P 800, which costs about 37,000 baht (550 pounds). This model is significant in terms of its distinctiveness that determines his cool identity in school. Furthermore, he wears

watches of famous brands such as Swiss and TAGHeuer, and he usually has at least 3,000 baht (40-50 pounds) in his wallet when he goes to school. Similarly, Tabb's friends also use trendy mobile phones, which they have been given as rewards for good exam results and as birthday present. This fits into Thai values, showing that Thai people give good rewards for good results and they want people to give them presents on special occasions. For example, Binn has a Samsung E 700 that can take multi-shot pictures, as a birthday present. Meanwhile, Tarr possesses a Kyocera KZ-850 equipped with a karaoke function, which was rewarded for good exam results last year. Mon also received a camera phone of the Kyocera brand on his birthday. From the interviews, it emerged that most of them have changed their mobile phones on average once per year or less.

After I introduced my status and contributed my PhD 'business card', Tabb's group was pleased to act as research participants. In addition, they allowed me to video-record and to take pictures of their activities in school between January and April 2004. As I observed, they were quite excited to meet someone who studied abroad. This is because according to certain cultural values in Thai society, people who study abroad are perceived either as brilliant students who can get governmental scholarships or as rich people who can finance their own overseas study. Therefore, during the interview, they also shared their experiences of travelling abroad with their families and happily talked about their plans of attending summer cultural camps in Tokyo, Japan on their approaching summer holiday in order to show their social status and wealth. Furthermore, they told me that their parents had planned to send them to study abroad, such as in the USA, Australia and New Zealand when they had finished high school in Bangkok.

Apart from the fieldwork with Tween and Teen schoolboys in both schools, I also conducted more than 20 tape-recorded in-depth interviews with their friends, both girls and boys, alongside the observation of my research participants. Eleven schoolgirls and schoolboys in the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School also took part in a focus group discussion at the end of March 2004. Some male students were also research participants in the observational research, such as Mo and Vee. Before conducting a focus group, I used the snowball sampling technique, asking my research participants to recruit their friends who met the qualifications and were

available to come to the focus group session. However, the schoolboys and schoolgirls in the St. John School were not able to participate in my focus group study because their school closed for the summer holiday earlier than other secondary schools in Bangkok.

Therefore, I developed contacts with twelve university students, who were added to the research, and I will use materials from this group at different stages of the research to compare with the Teen groups. Nonetheless, I found that the focus group analysis of male and female university groups provided interesting materials about the interpretation of mobile phone TV commercials in relation to their backgrounds, social values and norms, which were reflected through their mobile phone behaviours and associated with being cool, modern and wealthy people. My focus group participants, who were divided into four groups, can be described here according to the demographic data, i.e. age, class, gender and education.

Each group is composed of 5-6 people who are similar in terms of age, sex, class and education and know one another quite well. This is helpful in that each focus group provide in-depth discussion and engage in communication flow comfortably by giving opinions freely without pressures that can arise in such groups of those who do not know each other, like female university students and high school girls (see Fern 2001). In the same way, the male university group who know each other can talk freely on issues of courtships and sexual relationships amongst their close friends. This is because these topics naturally bring about the social norms and personal opinions associated with teenagers' lifestyles and they feel comfortable talking about these in front of their close friends. During the session, they give very interesting points on teenager's use of mobile phones, especially during their courtship, with both negative and positive aspects. There are some arguments about some points, but these are resolved amicably.

The two groups of middle class girls and boys [5] are 16-17 year old senior secondary school students of the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School who live near their school in the BungKum district, for example on Seri-Thai road, Rom Klao road, Navamin road, Ramkhamhaeng road, Bangkapi and Ladpraw road. Similarly, both female and male university students [6] participate. They are 19-21 years old and live near their

university in the Din-Deang district, as well as, for example, Prachachuen district, Din-Deang district, Huy Khawng district and Ladpraw district. Focusing upon this point, the focus group material is analysed according to the demographic and psychographic backgrounds of my research participants.

Given their student status, the average expenditure of senior secondary school students is less than 3,000 baht per month. This shows the economical values of Thai median middle class teenagers that parents limit their expenses because they are young. On the other hand, the average expenditure of university students was about 5,001-7,000 baht per month. Only two people spend in the range of 7,001- 9,000 baht per month. This is because some of the participants say they are not originally from Bangkok. Their parents live in other provinces in the South or the East of Thailand. Thus, they have to rent private accommodation or live with their cousins who had houses in Bangkok. Most of the high-school students, who live with their parents in Bangkok, spend less money than university students who have to rent their own accommodation. With regard to their demographic data and their expenditures, most of my focus group participants come from the median middle class rather than the new rich middle class. This allows me to consider that their expenditure on living costs per month illuminates their social status and lifestyles.

As Fern (2001:30-31) notes, "status appears to be associated with cultural value orientation. Attributions about status are based on perceptions of an individual's characteristic such as age, gender, race, education, occupation, income and wealth. Higher-status members have more power and influence in the group than do lower-status individuals." In this sense, I conceptualise status following Bourdieu's (1984) contribution in terms of the practical embodiment of norms and tastes by looking at my research focus group participants, who used fashionable or up-to-date mobile phones to portray their wealth and status through the accumulation of good taste and visual statements. As I observe, although the members of the focus group perceive themselves as equal in status, there is some competition amongst the female university group, expressed through, for example, fashionable clothes, handbags and models of mobile phone.

However, to some extent, when discussing the experiences of mobile phone use, they are quite embarrassed when they talk about why they changed mobile phone providers as a result of being cut off and overdue payment. This shows that they have experienced an inability to pay their bills in cases of overuse. This is related to certain social values in Thai society, where people are afraid of losing face in terms of lacking money. This is because money is an indicator of class distinction in Thai society. Thus, my research participants who come from the median middle class do not want other people to look down upon them despite the fact that they did not have money to pay their bills. On the other hand, they are proud of using the cool mobile phone handsets that they own. This raises some interesting issues related to their mobile phone experiences alongside the issues of content of phone commercials, brand images and exposure to TV commercials, which are associated with the search for modernity that I will discuss in chapter 8.

With respect to religion, all participants were Buddhist. Some of them were half Chinese - half Thais but most of them were of full Thai blood. Although, they felt slightly different in their race or ethnic origin, this was not the main concern to them because they were friends. The comparison that distinguished them from each other was whether or not they were from Bangkok. Basically, people who live in other provinces are likely to send their children to study in Bangkok due to its access to higher standards of education. Thus, they think that this can provide their children the opportunity to get better jobs and to form good social connections with Bangkok people. This reflects the values of Thai people in rural areas, who tend to think of Bangkok people as rich and high-class with good taste. On the contrary, Bangkok people also perceive country people whose children live in Bangkok as rich in view of their ability to send their children to study in Bangkok of which the cost of living is high, the same as in any other civic cities in the world.

In terms of cultural aspects, contemporary Thai teenagers tend to value individualism. That is, they try to seek their own selves as well as to be independent; meanwhile, a Thai tradition emphasises that people should help each other, if not rely on one another. An example of Thai teens' practice of individualism can be drawn upon the use of latest mobile phones to express their cool selves and to set them apart from others. In modern culture, Thai teens are crazy about new technologies and modern

lifestyles. It was observed that they, especially the male group, were excited about and interested in my latest laptop computer that I used to display the video clips. They asked me about where I bought it, its price, and its features. Afterwards, they started to talk about other models of laptop computer of their friends and family members that were similar to mine. Interestingly, the use of laptop assisted me to draw their attention to our discussions and to lead them to the theme of modern technology in their everyday lives - in this sense the mobile phone - during the focus group session.

From this material, the next section looks at how class relations and consumption patterns, in particular the consumption of the mobile phone, in relation to their tastes and styles, have contributed to the formation of identity in terms of the construction of the middle class, particularly the new rich middle class. My research reveals that the middle class has played a significant role in the modern consumer culture and also has generated consumerism in their children in terms of using cool brands of mobile phone.

The New Rich Middle Class and Consumerism

In Thailand, the new rich middle class are new social strata in the middle class group, represented by the white-collar middle class, the educated middle class and the consumer middle class that are measured respectively in terms of occupational categories, educational credentials and patterns of consumption (Pinches ibid; Ockey 1999). However, the new rich middle class is central to this study. The focus is specifically on the patterns of consumption of Thai middle class consumers, who are characterised in terms of their particular lifestyle constructed through commodity consumption, which celebrates Western affluence and advertising images (see Ockey ibid). The conspicuous consumption of the new rich middle class can be explained in terms of spending a lot of money intentionally to ensure that others notice and admire one's wealth. Therefore, this section shall illustrate the connections between consumption of high technology and fashionable mobile phones and lifestyles, tastes and class differentiations that are embedded in the consumerism of Thai middle class teenagers.

Various literatures have noted that the emerging new rich Thai middle class has become the foremost power in Thai society, having a far-reaching influence on urban life with their endless pursuit of consumerism, including both material and spiritual culture (Thongchai Winichakul 1995; Hewsion 1999; Askew ibid). In material culture, the new rich middle class are leaders in exerting an influence on Thai society by means of spending a lot of money and consuming luxury brands to reflect their glamorous self-images and lavish lifestyles, and in order to display their wealth (Kritsadarat Wattanasuwan 2000 and Sumsuk Hinviman 1999). They have become the 'dominant class which therefore demonstrate their superiority through access to high culture and high consumption' (Miles 1998:21). In terms of spiritual culture[7], the new rich middle class feel that it is fabulous to be rich and to get rich is glorious (Young 1999). This contradicts with the earlier point that I made about the economical values of the median middle class people in terms of their projection of humble, self-sufficient images. As a result, these different consumption values and lifestyles lead to tensions between two subclasses in Thai society. As Robinson and Goodman (1996:7) maintained, "these new conflicts might be characterised as the consequence of the emergence of the new rich, given that they bring to bear new forms of wealth generated through new systems of accumulation".

In this regard, the rises of the new rich and consumerism have led to a search for new 'lifestyles' in Bangkok. In this sense, shopping malls have metaphorically become new "temples" of modern Bangkok where Thai teenagers practice their rituals of buying their cool identities associated with models of mobile phones. As Rutledge (1992) maintained, "modernisation addresses life much differently. Where religion for central Thai Buddhists has in the past greatly influenced culture, western culture, consumerism on the heels of technology, is now overpowering religion (1992:35)". Put differently, consumerism has become a new religion for the Thai middle class, who respect money as a power. However, to some extent, this value is in contrast to those held by more *economical people*, who do not want to display wealth to others. The new rich Thai middle class favour luxurious things, accumulate wealth and attempt to express wealth in order to exercise their power and indicate their higher status. For the new rich Thai middle class, wealth signifies 'merit' and 'power' (Aewsriwong 1993, cited in Sumsuk Hinviman 1999). In many cases in this research, it is obvious that the new rich Thai middle class parents of Tween groups are likely to

buy expensive mobile phones for their children. This behaviour is related to the conspicuous consumption in Thai society and how they want other people to admire their wealth.

As a Thai proverb proclaims, *"Ngoen Kue Pra Chao"*, which literally means "money is power" or "money is God". The power of money to certain Thai people can be seen in another Thai proverb *"Mee Ngeun Nub Pen Nong, Mee Thong Nub Pen Pee,"* which means "if you have money (*Ngeun*) they call you younger brother *(Nong)*; if you have gold *(Thong)* they call you older brother *(Pee)*". To elaborate, people can become kin through the significance of their possessions, and this is related to the level of respect they engender. For example, gold is viewed as superior thus signifies an older brother; meanwhile, money is viewed as less valuable thus signifies a younger brother.

Building upon this point, such 'core' value is also being transferred to Thai teenagers by means of using expensive models of mobile phone to show superiority and luxury and to be perceived as cool and modern amongst their peer groups. Subsequently, they want to replace their mobile phones with more stylish and pricy ones in order to keep up with their friends, follow the fashion, and display their wealth. In this regard, wealth can be linked to the influence of the new rich Thai middle class in view of conspicuous consumption. To elaborate on this, Golf, one of my research participants has had eleven mobile phone handsets so far. The latest one is an expensive Nokia Engage. This model is seen as cool by his peer group because it is not only a mobile phone but it can also function as a game station and an MP3 player. In this light, taste and style are important issues to the new rich such as Golf (Pinches ibid). Later, Mo, another research participant wants to change his mobile phone to resemble Golf's Nokia Engage. My research suggests that when a specific model of mobile phone goes out of fashion, Thai teenagers are no longer satisfied with it. This behaviour may not be distinct from that of young people in other countries, but this case is different in the sense that mobile phones are used to indicate social status, modernity and wealth in Thai society. As a matter of fact, my research reveals that Thai teenagers use mobile phones to seek pleasure and as a means of marking their social status. The above material allows me to point out the connection between conspicuous

consumption and the different forms of taste of different classes and ethnic traditions, from past to present.

Historically, Thai society was composed of different social hierarchies or *Sakdina* [8], which were later classified into the castes of royal family, the aristocrats, the masters and the labourers. This fundamental authority-based ranking was the root of Thai culture. It can be seen in the hierarchical relationships in Thai society, particularly in the 'patron/client' relationships [9], which are based on the belief of inequalities of social status according to the *Sakdina* system. In this light, principal identity of people appeared to be associated with a particular caste. To illustrate the *Sakdina* system, Thai people in the past belonged to each caste through their birth and remained in such caste till their death. For example, people who were born in the labour class were known as *Tas*. They were ruled by the master or *Nai* system. They could not have their own lands or money to support a lavish lifestyle; more specifically they could not have freedom to choose other careers. In brief, they could only be labourers for their masters.

In this regard, the class distinction was made upon the accumulation of land and treasures, especially among the royal family and the aristocrats who were the ruling classes and worked for the king-ruled government. They also generated conspicuous consumption[10] by collecting antiques, jewellery, house decorations, English books, Western wines and cigarettes in order to present their tastes and encourage other people to admire their wealth. In addition, high culture (literature, music and art), western lifestyle and tastes were the indicators of the elite class.

After the decline of the absolute monarchy in 1932, the capitalist economy was the dominant factor of the transitions of modernity in the Thai kingdom; therefore, the boundaries of social class distinction had been articulated by consumption and wealth rather than the *Sakdina* status (Askew ibid; Mulder 2000). More specifically, in the reign of King Rama V, who was a patron of modernity, the liberation of the labourers' class or *Tas* system was announced. As a consequence, numerous emigrants from China migrated to settle down in Thailand and they initially worked as labourers. Afterwards, Chinese (both locally and Chinese born) had developed their businesses which grew and covered all levels of trade, manufacturing and distribution in

Thailand (Juree 1979; Askew ibid). Therefore, the new rich middle class emerged in Thai society because of their Chinese ancestors' successful trades with the Thai government and the Thai people. As they became rich, they struggled to distinguish themselves from the working class by emulating the elite class (Pinches ibid). Furthermore, they tried to generate new styles and modes of consumption in relation to the standard of living and the images of the 'West'.

In the present day, most of the new rich Thai middle class come from business families. As noted, they have adopted aspects of identities and lifestyles of "elite culture" or "western culture" in order to upgrade their social status. As Bocock and Thompson (1992: 131) maintained, 'social status groups use patterns of consumption as a means of establishing their rank or worth and demarcating themselves from others.' As a reflection of this phenomenon, the following account demonstrates the new rich consumption in relation to the making of new rich identities.

Tabb is a Sino-Thai offspring whose ancestors (grandparents of both sides) came from China while parents were both born in Thailand. Tabb's parents run a furniture import business. Therefore, Tabb needs to help his parents run their business when he grows up. He is currently acting as their assistant manager and being well trained by his parents, for example, to take orders from customers and to keep accounts. Apart from English classes in his school, Tabb has had many chances to travel to Europe, the USA and Australia with his parents so as to practice English in the real world. His parents have set up a plan for him to study abroad in Australia or New Zealand in the future. As a result of his experiences in foreign countries, he likes to use popular global brand name items, more specifically watches (TAGHeuer), T-shirts (Polo) and wallets (Louis Vuitton), as well as a cool mobile phone (Sony Ericsson P 800). As Tabb puts it, *"Wearing brand names makes me feel confident. Brand names are of higher quality and higher tastes that are associated with the western style. My parents always tell me that people who wear brand names can get consideration or respect from others."*

Tabb is among the new rich middle class who construct their own identities and define others through the commodities they purchase (Halter 2000). In generating new rich identities, the majority of the new rich Thai middle class not only express their

sumptuous styles through wearing brand names, but also acquire higher levels of formal education than their parents' generation. Most of them have good education abroad; therefore, they welcome and maintain the understanding of 'western culture', which is considered to represent a higher status. Therefore, the new rich middle class are inspired by western-oriented worldviews and notions of individualism, which give form to their modern lives and entail the appropriation of Western luxury, as noted in Tabb's account (Aewsriwong 1993, Piriyarangsan and Phongpaichit 1993; Laothamatas 1993). The connection of these new rich identities and the conspicuous consumption of mobile phones are shown below.

According to Veblen's (1994) theory of conspicuous consumption, consumption can be a mark of social status in terms of spending a lot of money intentionally to ensure that others notice and admire one for one's wealth. Based on this, I observed that mobile phone use amongst Thai middle class teenagers can be utilized both as a means of shaping self-image for oneself and as a means to impress others. By acquiring a mark of social status, the new rich Thai middle class teenagers gain acceptance according to the luxury items they own, which transmit a social message that they are cool and modern. In this context, Thai teenagers' particular attention to luxury brand consumption, especially with regard to trendy mobile phone brands, has become a cultural heritage which parents pass their newly rich selves on to their children, as shown in the following accounts.

At the time of study, Tabb who is the new rich middle class offspring owned the Sony Ericsson P800, which was the latest model. He said, *my father chose it for me because it was the best mobile phone model in the world at that time and, of course, expensive. It includes many features such as a colour screen, a digital camera, polyphonic ring tones, a Palm-like organizer and Internet facilities. Of course, it is very expensive (37,000 baht). In most cases, businessmen use this model. Anyway, I think it suits me as well because I use it for taking orders of my parents' customers at the weekend. It reflects my identity as modern, unique and hi-technology, more or less.* Therefore, Tabb is very proud of his mobile phone; as he said, nobody in this school has the same model. For Tabb, his mobile phone has become a smart phone with its small palmtop organizer function. As he said, *I think it's worthwhile for me even though the price is quite high. Yet, when I use it, I don't feel it is expensive at all.*

In this regard, Tabb's mobile phone use can reflect a picture of the privilege of "white collar" or upper middle class workers who have succeeded in work in Bangkok. In this sense, the mobile phone, especially the more expensive models, has become a significant reward for success in life or work amongst Thai teenagers. Even though it is sometimes not necessary for Thai teenagers to have expensive mobile phone handsets, many parents still buy mobile phones for them as a birthday gift or a reward for good examination results and good behaviour. In addition to this, my survey research showed that thirty five percent of Thai teenagers obtained new mobile phones because their old phones were out of fashion, and their mothers had a great deal of influence on the purchase of mobile phones, at forty percent[11].

My material will ground the collective identities of the new rich middle class and the symbolic distinctions that arise through the practice of consumption, which are crucial to the making of class, ethnic and social status relations (Pinches ibid:26). The following discussion focuses on the crucial role played by conspicuous consumption in the cultural construction of the new rich middle class in Thai society. This comparison shows how the new rich middle class offspring and the median middle class offspring make distinctions in term of marking their status symbols, emulation and competition with others on the basis of consumerism, as noted. In this light, the massive growth in luxury consumer goods and the associated development of fashion and lifestyle marketing have focused heavily on members of the new rich middle class and their capacity to spend, generating at the same time an overabundance of consumer images for the wider population (Featherstone 1991:108-9). Meanwhile, the median middle subclass seek ways to emulate this conspicuous consumption, such as the idea of 'buy now, pay later', which is widespread in Thai society. I will use my research material to demonstrate this.

In relation to the consumption of household goods, many people in Bangkok like the idea of 'Buy now Pay later' or 'Jai Kon Pon Tee Lang'. Owning household electric appliances such as television sets, computers, stereos and washing machines reflects their modernity and enhances their convenient lifestyles. This signifies the image of a better standard of living in modern society to people who visit their homes. Subsequently, it has altered a consumption pattern of Thai people in urban settings. For example, Mo, one of my research participants from the median middle class who

was mentioned earlier, is buying a mobile phone on credit because he does not have enough money at the moment. The following conservation between Vee and Mo can provide an understanding of the idea of 'Buy now, Pay later'.

> Vee: I am curious about why your parents gave you the permission to buy it. It's very expensive. How did you get the money?

> Mo: I explained to my mum why the Nokia Engage is important to me and I gave her many reasons to persuade her, such as promising her that I won't change my mobile phone handset for one year and a half. Thus, one day we were shopping in Tesco Lotus near our house. We saw mobile phone shops offering low payment loans for credit card holders. So, my mum now makes the monthly payments for me and I have to repay her later from my living allowance.

> Vee: I can't believe it. I want to change my mobile phone, too. I'm afraid my dad will not agree with the idea of a loan. Although I have saved money to buy a new mobile phone on my own, he wants me to use my old one until it can no longer be used.

As illustrated by this conversation, economical personal values are in contrast to the consumerist values in Mo and Vee's accounts and these values are cultivated by their parents. In this situation, Mo's mother decided to hire-purchase the expensive mobile phone for him even though she tried to cultivate the economical value to him. This shows that sometimes parents are less influential than friends in displaying cool identities. My research suggests that Thai middle class teenagers regard consumerist values and materialism as 'core' values which are related to mobile phone use in their everyday lives; this is subsequently reflected in their lifestyles and their purchasing attitudes.

As noted, Mo and Vee had ordinary mobile phone handsets, which were not able to take pictures and did not have a colour screen or polyphonic ring tones. On the contrary, Golf, a close friend of theirs, had purchased the Nokia Engage, which worked like a game station and was the latest model at that time. Thus, the Nokia

Engage brought about tensions of unsatisfied need and desire to the peer group, in particular Vee. Then, two months after Golf first got his Nokia Engage, I found that Mo had changed his Nokia 3321 to exactly the same model as Golf by borrowing money from his mother. To elaborate on this, Mo's economical values were changed by the influence of close friends like Golf. To some extent, he had wanted this model all along, as a result of seeing other people use such a high-technology mobile phone, but he kept his desire to himself because his mother did not allow it at that time. As mentioned earlier, Mo was not spoiled by parents with luxurious gifts. Thus, after buying his Nokia Engage, he had to pay money back to his mother by saving it from his living allowances. This is expected to help him develop an awareness of the worth of money. However, saving money to repay his mother is regarded as another economical value although it is perceived as less important than the pleasure of his new mobile phone. As Mo noted:

> I bought the same model as Golf's because he can advise me about where I can buy a cheap Multi Media Card (MMC). I can borrow games from him, and we can exchange games in the future. Yesterday, I stayed at home all day to play my Engage. It has GPRS and Bluetooth functions so that I can see who is using a mobile phone in the nearby area. It works just like opening MSN in that it is possible to chat with others if you want. Besides, the Nokia Engage advert was attractive.

However, it seems that Vee was also dissatisfied with his Sony Ericsson T 200 on the Thai mobile system, mostly because of its grey screen and basic functions. Such features meant that his mobile phone signal was not good in crowded and remote areas. Sometimes, he could not receive or make calls even in his own home. As he complained: *"It's quite frustrating for me. You know, I really want to have a new, trendy one. For me, I really want the colour screen and digital camera, including the good features, but I am afraid my father will not allow me to have it even though it will be paid out of my pocket."* Vee's desire for a cool mobile phone was clearly apparent. This is similar to his friends, who also wanted better phones. When I was amongst his friends in a shopping area, Vee sometimes borrowed the Nokia Engage from Golf simply to play with it. By holding it in his hand in front of the crowds, Vee was obviously pretending that it belonged to him. Vee always kept his own out-of-

date mobile phone hidden in a small white bag. My analysis shows that it is not easy to be an 'economical person' for Thai teenagers under the peer pressure and influence of fashion, as was evident in Vee and Mo's cases even though they are *economical people.*

The following discussion highlights the fact that 'fashion and taste' proved to be important factors in purchasing decisions in the minds of Thai consumers. 'Values and attitudes', as a new moral approach, has played a crucial role in Thai teenagers' spending, especially among those in the new rich middle class (see Campbell 1987). I observed that Tabb's group enthusiastically capitulate to the search for fashion, stimulated by social emulation practices and class competition (McKendrick et al 1982). They also notably practice their styles and tastes in shopping malls and emulate them at school. These activities have become fashion statements amongst Tabb's group, who adopt these statements as part of their identities.

In this regard, Campbell (1995:118) argues that 'the essential activity of consumption is thus not the actual selection, purchase or use of products, but rather the imaginative pleasure-seeking...' I have drawn upon Campbell's study regarding the point that pleasure can be found in any or all consumption experiences. He further stated that there are differences between seeking pleasure in sensations and seeking pleasure in emotions. In this sense, the actual consumption of a product or service can provide satisfaction and pleasure; on the other hand, the consumption experience can provide more pleasure for the imagination regarding the illusion of the product. The seeking for pleasure is supported by Golf, one of my research participants, who shared his consumption experience in this regard.

> I have used eleven mobile phone handsets so far. I began with Sony Ericsson T10, Nokia 3310 and 3350, Siemens SL45i, Nokia 6510, Nokia 8850, Nokia 3310, as well as Nokia Engage. The Nokia Engage was the most satisfying to me. This was because it was an integration of a game station and an FM stereo in the same handset. (Golf, 17 years old).

This is related to the imaginative pleasure of Mo, one of my research participants who demonstrated this, *I'm looking for a new one but I don't have enough money now.*

Actually, the mobile phone of my dreams is the O2 XPA model. It's a kind of pocket PC and can be used like an organizer (Mo, interviewed while window-shopping in January 2004).

This is relevant to *Bert*, 20 years old, a male university student who noted that, *I started my mobile phone experiences with the Siemens C25 but it was too small. I used the Siemens C 25 for one year; then I changed it to the Siemens M 35 for a while. At that time, the Siemens SL 45 was very beautiful, luxurious and high- tech. However, I felt that the Siemens brand was not durable. Thus, I changed again to use a Nokia 3650, which I have at the moment. This is because it has many features like a colour screen, video mode and digital camera.*

Focusing upon this point, the over-consumption of mobile phones, as illustrated when one person owns two handsets or two 'SIM' cards, will be explored on Cherry's account, a 20-year-old female university student and a research participant. As she expressed, *I have two SIM cards or two mobile phone numbers for swappable use on one mobile handset. I give my One2call number to the majority of people because the signal is better. I give my special friends my DTAC number because it is of cheap airtime calling rate* (Girl, 20 years old).

Such circumstances can illustrate the social and cultural changes that reflect consumer behaviour amongst Thai middle class teenagers. That is, the over-consumption of mobile phones has increased the collective consumerist values in some Thai middle class teenagers despite the fact that they do not have the money to pay their mobile phone bills and their parents have to take responsibility for them. Keaw, one of my focus group interviewees provided her reason to use two handsets:

> Keaw: *I used a PCT [12] before but I sold it to my friend. I then use the money to buy a new mobile phone. Then, I went back to using a PCT again because I could not afford the mobile phone bills. My parents always complained about my over-billing per month. This is because One2Call (a pre-paid service), the system of AIS I used, cost me 5 baht per minute. Now, I have two handsets; one is a PCT to make calls*

because of its cheaper rate, while the other is a mobile phone that I use to receive calls because it has good signal reception. (Girl, 16 years old)

This view is supported by a similar case of *Kookai*, one of my focus group participants who noted that *Sometimes, I switch mobile phone between mine and mom's. She has a better model than mine, so it is cool to use the expensive model sometimes.*

With these accounts, my research has demonstrated that the consumerist tendencies in mobile phone consumption are considered as more important than the economical values of Thai middle class teenagers. This has been unfolded in relation to the formation of identity. More specifically, the tastes and styles of the new rich middle class maintain a social class distinction, which is associated with ethnicity. As noted, Sino-Thais are perceived as richer than those with full Thai blood. Therefore, in the next section, I shall illustrate how ethnicity can be regarded as a symbolic force to affirm ethnicities (Gillespie 1995; Back 1996) of both Sino-Thai and full Thai blood on the basis of their shared religion and beliefs to show the collectives tastes in terms of mobile phone use. Furthermore, the way new rich middle class acquire the new forms of lifestyles to identify their identity will be examined.

In this light, I argue that religion and ethnicity are significant in the formation of cultural identity (Hall 1988). By examining this, my material will bring out how Thai middle class teenagers give significance to Buddhist practices such as the feeding monks and good acts in terms of thoughts, actions and words, which are related to the formation of cultural identities and the presentation of modernity. These behaviors can also be regarded as the ritual practice of Thai teenagers in holy places that are associated with mobile phone use within the modern culture. The connections between the use of mobile phones and manners in holy places reflect contradictory social values in terms of paying homage and being modern, illuminating the Buddhist beliefs of Thai middle class teenagers in the modern culture.

2.2) Ethnicity, Religion and Beliefs of Thai middle class teenagers

In this section, I aim to discuss how the notions of ethnicity, religion and belief have been engaged in the formations of cultural identity among Thai middle class teenagers in Bangkok through the notion of mobile phone use. This section shows these connections in terms of how Bangkok has become a centre of cultural diversity with different ethnicities and religions, which have played a fundamental role in reproducing collective patterns of mobile phone preferences based on class distinctions. By this, I shall argue that the differences in social status demonstrate superiority through access to high consumption, which is simply understood by their ownership or possession, particularly of mobile phone (Miles 1998; Spitulnik 2002). Therefore, my material illustrates that different ethnicities, Sino-Thai and full Thai blood, who have the same Buddhist religion and beliefs, use their mobile phones in the same social spaces as a mark of social status to present their wealth (see Bourdieu 1984). However, I will show that the two different groups display their consumption in different ways. Before examining this, I shall provide an understanding of distinctive Sino-Thai and full Thai blood ethnicities in Thai society in this regard.

At the present time, Sino-Thais[13] are perceived as rich people because in the past, Chinese people came to Thailand and traded well with Thais. They became rich, and then the Thai government gave them Thai surnames, especially the Chinese traders who brought great benefits to Thailand, to indicate that they had become Thai people. Alternatively, they were given honours such as posts within the government to help improve its management. Generally, Chinese people who had settled in Thailand for a long time were able to choose whatever surnames they wished. They usually chose surnames that were relevant to the meanings of wealth, successful trade and bountiful families.

Thus, their heirs in the present day have followed in their ancestors' footsteps of successful business owners. Meanwhile, original Thais have often been cultivated to be government officers in public service on the basis that they would not get paid very much. Briefly, most of Thailand's wealthiest people are Sino-Thais. Besides, most of my research participants were Sino-Thais offspring, and Thai people can distinguish between Sino-Thais and full Thai blood by looking at one another's surnames.

Basically, Thai people have two names: a first name and a surname. However, the surnames of full Thai blood people are short, with two or three syllables, and generally signify goodness, merit and power, such as *Bunnag* (merit power), *Konkum* (Gold) and *Marayad* (manners). In contrast, Sino-Thai surnames are longer, with more than three syllables. Furthermore, their meanings signify wealth and family treasures, such as *Khongpoemkosol* (collective treasures), *Kanchanarithakorn* (richness), *Techaprathumvong* (wealthy family) and so forth.

Some full Thai bloods want to improve their social status and their image by choosing new surnames for themselves that are more like Sino-Thai surnames. To clarify this, my previous surname was *Pakasombut* (wealth). However, my father, who was not satisfied with his surname because he was not successful in business after he quit his teaching job in 1997, chose a new surname, *Ukritwiriya* (great effort) whose sound and syllables resemble a Sino-Thai surname. After consulting with a fortune-teller, he believed that this new surname would help him to be successful in business; unfortunately, his belief was wrong. Afterwards, I used *Ukritwiriya* as my new surname. Then, I was perceived as rich because of such surname, which sounds like I am from the new rich middle class. However, the image of my Sino-Thai ethnicity changed again when I adopted my current surname, *Bunnag*, after my marriage. This surname is generally associated with the elite upper class or the old rich because the original members of this family were aristocrats and elite people in Thai society. This reflects Thai social values in distinguishing people's wealth simply by their surnames and their ethnicities.

Apart from the consideration of Sino–Thais' surnames, some understanding of the peculiarities of ethnicities can be presented through their belongings or possessions, particularly mobile phones. De Mooij (2004) asserted that commodities can be perceived as a means of achieving personal happiness, success and self-fulfilment, which are encouraged by associated cultural norms. This 'core' value has been cultivated and transferred to Thai middle class teenagers in a sense that high technology and expensive mobile phones can represent their identity. To elaborate on this, my research participants, who were offspring of Sino-Thai families, presented themselves to their peer groups as wealthy by wearing brand names, talking about their experiences abroad, and specifically by owning high technology and expensive

mobile phones. In this regard, the mobile phone can be understood as a focus of social competition and the manipulation of social emulation amongst friends in order to express their social identities. In particular, some of the full Thai bloods who are also wealthy attempted to use trendy mobile phones to show their equal status. My research participants provide evidence in this regard.

In Tabb's group, I observed that Tabb and Binn are of Chinese-Thai ethnicity, whilst Tarr and Mon are of full Thai blood. Tabb and Binn often mention their families' business and that they will have to help their parents run these businesses in the future. Tabb's parents own a furniture import business, whilst Binn's parents have an electronics shop in a famous department store. At the weekends, Tabb and Binn have to learn business from their parents. In summer holidays, they sometimes travel abroad with their parents because their parents have been given incentives by suppliers for reaching sales targets. Obviously, Tabb and Binn frequently change their mobile phones to follow fashion because their parents reward them for helping with their businesses. At this moment, Tabb owns a Sony Ericsson P 800 and Binn has a Samsung E 700. As can be seen, these models are rather more expensive than Tarr's and Mon's mobile phones.

Meanwhile, Tarr and Mon also own trendy mobile phones of the Kyocera brand, although most Thai teenagers perceived these as less popular than Sony Ericsson and Samsung. As Tarr put it, *"at the moment, Hutch, a new mobile phone provider, is running a promotion of buying one handset and getting another for free. Thus, my mum bought them for me and my sister"*. Mon also put it in the same way: *"I use Hutch as well because it was a cheaper mobile phone handset. I don't care about its signal because I rarely use it. My sister always uses mine to talk to her friend for a long time because the air time rate is cheaper than hers."*

This contrasts with Tabb and Binn's opinions, in particular Tabb. He said he did not appreciate any kinds of promotion even though they were so cheap. To him, the promotion signified either low-class products or fashionable products that were not durable. As he put it, *"I like the AIS-GSM Advance because its signal is strong and it has more power even in the countryside, lifts and the mountains. It is a premium*

brand of mobile phone provider in the market. In the same way, my Sony Ericsson P800 handset is still the top-ranked model. "

From this point of view, ethnicity relies on shared values, norms, cultural practices, symbols and artefacts (Barker 2004) that are associated with the tastes and styles of Sino-Thais and full Thais in using mobile phones. In this context, Tabb and his friends show their perceptions of 'coolness' and modernity through the models of mobile phones that they use. Furthermore, they mentioned that people who do not use mobile phones are referred to as *"Lao"*[14]. This refers to people who are out of date, uncivilised and unfashionable. *Lao* has become a notorious slang word that is used amongst Thai teenagers to denigrate ethnic minority groups as stupid and lazy. This is relevant to people who do not have mobile phones and are not connected with the modern culture and people who use out-of-fashion mobile phones.

My research suggests that although ethnicities can indicate distinctions in wealth and taste amongst Tabb's peer group, my research participants who are of Sino-Thai or full Thai blood ethnicities are not concerned about their ethnicities, which are associated with their class distinctions. Their friendship is of the greatest importance to them. At the present time, Sino-Thai and full Thai blood are mixed in the same context of Thai national identity, religion and belief. As a matter of fact, Buddhism, as the main religion, has played a dominant role in shaping Thai society and the way in which Thai teenagers behave. Most Thai people, regardless of ethnic variation, believe in the same 'good Karma' or 'good behaviour' and 'bad Karma' or 'bad behaviour', as well as reincarnation according to Lord Buddha's principle.

'Good Karma' and 'bad Karma' are evidenced by a famous Thai proverb *"Tam Dee Dai Dee, Tam Shua Dai Shua"*, which literally means, *"Making good karma brings us good things. Making bad karma brings us bad things"* In short, it is believed that what happens to people in present life is a result of what they have done in a previous existence. Therefore, the accumulation of good Karma or merit, known as *'Boon'*, can be overtly practiced in different ways, such as giving donations, offering food to monks, going to the temple and praying and so forth. On the other hand, bad karma is called *'Baab'* or sin (Mulder 2000). As noted, most Thai people, even if they are of different ethnicities, believe in the same religion, Buddhism.

Take Tabb's account as an example. Tabb follows the path of Buddhist principles in his everyday life; for instance, he practices good thoughts (*Kid Dee*), good acts *(Tam Dee)* and good words *(Pud Dee)* towards others. Tabb also mentioned other friends who think badly of him. He said he believed in good and bad karma. As he put it, *"If someone thinks badly of me or acts badly towards me, they sooner or later will get bad things in return."* To elaborate, he does not like to have quarrels neither on the mobile phone nor face-to-face. This is because quarrels put him in a bad mood all day. In this sense, having a quarrel with others represents a bad behaviour. This example shows how Tabb, a Sino Thai, values the significance of making merit in the context of Buddhism.

Furthermore, 'Boon' and 'Baab' have exerted an influence on Tabb's way of life, as reflected through his behaviours and attitudes. He also believes that by means of merit-making, he will gain a better standard of living in his next life. This Buddhist belief demonstrates the way in which Tabb and his peer group incorporate the law of Karma and the basic five Buddhist precepts in their daily lives. There are (1) to abstain from killing (2) To abstain from stealing (3) To abstain from sexual impropriety (4) To abstain from falsehoods or lying (5) To abstain from intoxicants (Rutledge, 1992:10). In order to maintain good Karma, my research participants practice good behaviour; for example, they gave food to monks early in the morning before starting their classes and they tend to behave in ways that reflect the three good acts, i.e. thought, act and words. One encounter from my fieldwork experiences can demonstrate Tabb and his peer group's Buddhist beliefs through their cultural identities in this regard in order to show how religion has become part of their everyday lives. This becomes an extended setting through other kinds of interactions that connect with the mobile.

(Tabb and friends gave food to the monk)

Early one morning at the St. John school, I followed Tabb and his friends as they were taking food to the monk. Giving food to the monk was part of Tabb and his friends' routine activities when they came to school. They bought some food (i.e. two main courses with rice and one Thai dessert plus a drink, which cost 20 baht - around 35 pence) from a street vendor. Before offering food to the monk, they raised the plate of food up and then prayed for a better life in the next re-incarnation and asked for good grades, good jobs and success in love in this life. While they were giving food to the monk, the school radio broadcast announced that a mobile phone handset of one of the junior students had been stolen. The announcement said, *"If any student has found the stolen mobile phone, please return it to the school information desk"*. Obviously, this announcement shows the engagement of conspicuous consumption in a negative way, which is related to the second Buddhist precept of trying to abstain from stealing. In school, a mobile phone is seen as one of the most precious things for Thai teenagers, and the theft of a phone thus becomes a distinctive example to cultivate students' morals in daily life, encouraging them to be afraid of sin. Suddenly, Tabb said to me that the thief must surely pay back his/her *'Baab'* or sin in the near future because of such stealing. He also believes that people can get Baab very quickly in this life; Baab will not wait until the next life.

I am very scared of Baab. Even though I have half Chinese blood, *Ah Ma* (grandmother) and my parents always teach me to follow the Lord

Buddha's principles such as to feed monks in the Buddhist way. I do it every day before attending class in the morning in order to donate Boon to my close neighbour who was killed in a car accident last year. We believe that bringing food to the monk can transfer "Boon" to the dead people in the hell. Furthermore, I have tried to practice good acts, good thoughts and good words to other people. For example, I always talk nicely on my mobile phone and never get annoyed or angry with somebody who called me at the wrong number - Tabb noted.

From Tabb's account, the significance of talking nicely to people demonstrates the importance of good words, one of the merit-making practices that Thai people could practice simply in their daily lives. In this regard, the mobile phone thief's account can be regarded as one example to show the relationship between Buddhist beliefs and Thai teenagers' practices in the modern culture, in the sense that they avoid stealing things from others. This is especially the case for Tabb. Nonetheless, Tabb further mentioned that there are some students in his school who do not follow the law of Karma because they keep stealing particularly cool and fashionable mobile phones from others. This allows me to further discuss the point of ignoring religious belief in the sense that sometimes the desire to use cool mobile phones beyond their means has encouraged them to fall into consumerism and fetishism, which is called *Tanha* (greed) in Thai. This shows that materialism and consumerism have become core values and general practices in Thai society, and that they overpower the religious practices of Thai teenagers.

Another example of social values that is incorporated into mobile phone interaction is the belief in fortune and miracles. Most Thai people, both urban and rural, believe in fortune and fate, which can be expressed through their belief in fortune-tellers, gambling risks and superstition. In this sense, Thai middle class teenagers also engage in social relations with their mobile phones based on belief in fortune and miracles, as evidenced by special non-voice services that are used to check their daily horoscopes. Two of my research participants show their beliefs in this regard: *I like to check my horoscope via the mobile phone sometimes. It costs me 5 baht per minute, but that varies depending on the day you are born. For example, I follow their instructions, which tell me to press 3 for Tuesday, and then I can listen to my horoscope. I believe*

in miracles although I cannot prove them (Ton, 17 years old). This is related to another girl who says, *I used to call fortune-tellers, like Tepthida Payakorn (The princess of fortune) or someone else, who advertise themselves on TV on special numbers. I paid around 120 baht per 12 minutes for a brief prophecy. I didn't like it. Thus, I prefer to go to fortune-tellers' shops where I can have more details (Nat, 17 years old)*.

Apart from checking their daily horoscopes, some of my research participants like to check football results and send text messages to answer the questions on TV quizzes and game shows. This is related to a fundamental value in Thai society in the sense that people like gambling and wish to be rich as a result of good luck. One of my research participants expressed this: *I use my mobile phone to text messages to TV game shows, as they said "If you agree, press 1, or if you do not agree, press 0 within 30 minutes. Then the first five people can get a reward, but I have never ever got it. However, I still play with them in the hope that that one day I will have good luck (Pik, 21 years old)*.

Mobile phones: calling me at the Holy Places

Apart from the social interactions associated with the belief in fate via the mobile phone service, Thai teenagers - both Sino-Thai and full-Thai bloods - also worship holy places at which they pray for their destinies by wishing for miracles to help improve their lives, in terms of, for example, wealth, health and flourishing love. In Bangkok, these holy places are ubiquitous, including the shrines of the Hindu Gods *(Wat Kaek)*, the Thai temples *(Wat)*, the Chinese shrines *(San Chao)*. Moreover, even a big tree that has peculiar features can sometimes be regarded as holy. A Thai proverb says, *"Mai Chua Yah Lob Lue"* reminds people that if you don't believe it, you shouldn't criticise it. Therefore, the evidence of many Thai teenagers going to those sacred places demonstrates that this proverb has rooted in Thai belief. As Mulder (2000:25) stated, "most Thai people basically believed in the power of sacred objects *(Sing Saksit)* such as Buddha images, stupas (*Chedi*), temple buildings, holy water, the spirits and the gods, as well as in the shrines in which they are immanent". This allows me to show the connection between the cultural transformations and

syncretic religion that arises through the activities of my research participants with mobile phone as a part of this aspect of life.

In particular, *Pra Trimurati Shrine*, a holy shrine of a Hindu god, located on Rachadamri Road in the business centre in Bangkok, has become a popular place for Thai teenagers, who go there to pray for romantic success especially on the Valentine's Day. In addition, the Four Faces of Brahma *(Pra Prom Erawan or Thao Maha Phom)*, a famous replica of a Hindu god, which is located on the opposite side of *Pra Trimurati*, has also played a powerful role in Thai belief. As Thai people know it, when people make a wish to these gods and their wishes are granted, they have to express their gratitude by offering the gods only their favourite things. For example, *Pra trimurati* is said to appreciate red roses whereas *Pra Prom Erawan* is said to be fond of *La khon Chatri* (a Thai classical dance) performances and elephant dolls[15]. My fieldwork experiences in one evening at the shrine of *Pra Prom Erawan* while the Thai classical dance was being performed can show the connection of religion ritual and the mobile phone as a part of modernity in this regard.

On one evening at the shrine of *Pra Prom Erawan*, I watched many people, both Thais and foreigners, paying homage to *Pra Prom Erawan*'s statue. Most of them were holding yellow flowers or garlands and bunches of joss sticks and praying for their wishes to come true. Apart from people paying homage to *Pra Prom Erawan*, the interlude of a Thai classical dance highlighted this evening. Generally, most Thai people believe that when their wishes have been granted by the god, they should offer something to the god to show their gratitude. After two young female dancers gave their beautiful performances, they went to their leisure places among their peer groups and then made phone calls to others. Sometimes, I saw them receiving calls and talking until the next round of performance was about to start.

From above material, the mobile phone has entered into many settings of Thai people, even in the holy territories that are signified as quiet places where people need to concentrate on sacred objects. However, Thai people place more significance on the behaviours of calling and receiving phone calls in these ritual spaces than on paying homage, which has become a mundane picture in the modern culture. This allows me

to show another ritual space where cultural practices are associated with mobile phone use (see VCD for more details).

(Thai people paying homage to *Pra Prom Erawan*)

With specific regard to *Pra Trimurati*'s statue[16], Thai teenagers believe that this god will answer their prayers with blessings of fortune, prosperity and happiness. Consequently, these beliefs have coloured the background of religious belief and the syncretic cultural activities of Thai teenagers on the Valentine's Day. My research suggests that the connection of social interaction with these places and the mobile phone can be viewed in the following regard. That is, mobile phones for teenagers not only play a pivotal role as a communicative device in confirming meeting places with their friends or making arrangements to meet there, but they also represent the cool and modern identities of users. More specifically, *Pra Trimurati Shrine* is usually crowded with many Thai teenagers of both sexes as they want to participate in this holy event in order to pray for their true love. To make the event more special, the phenomenon that Pra Trimurati draws a lot of people's attentions to gather there before the Valentine's Day has also been broadcast on radio.

On 12 February 2004, I listened to 105.5 FM and heard that a big crowd who believed in *Pra Trimurati* would gather in front of the Central World Plaza on Rachadamri road to pray for successful love before the Valentine's festival. Afterwards, I made a

phone call to my research participants from the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School to ask them if they wanted to join this event. Although they did not refuse me at first, they later sent me text messages (SMS) to cancel the appointment, claiming various excuses. This illustrates one of the social values in Thai culture. Most Thai people are likely to act considerately towards other people. This consideration is called *Kreng Jai*. It means that Thai people should take other people's feelings into account or fear of offending someone. Therefore, my research participants illustrated this point in that they did not dare to refuse people in words, especially elder people, because of the *Kreng Jai*. They felt less guilt if they could refuse by mobile phone SMS because they did not have to interact face-to-face. However, my observation took place at the *Pra Trimurati* shrine two days before the Valentine's Day, without my research participants.

At the holy place, some people gave interviews to the press, recounting unbelievable stories that they had asked *Pra Trimurati* to give them soul-mates or reunite them with ex-lovers who they had not seen for ages, and their wishes had been fulfilled. *Pra Trimurati* is popular among Thai teenagers, who regard him as having a miraculous power. Every Thursday night after 9 pm, a crowd holding red roses, joss sticks and candles gather in front of the *Pra Trimurati* statue at the Central World Plaza shopping centre and pray. As well as praying the text of sermons, the worshippers have to identify themselves by speaking their names and addresses. Thai teenagers believe that *Pra Trimurati* cannot identify which prayer is which unless they articulate their identifications clearly because of the fact that so many people pray each day. Therefore, confirming their names and addresses means that the god will not get confused.

To compare *Pra Trimurati* with *Pra Prom Erawan*, which is located on the opposite side, teenagers regard *Pra Trimurati* as the three-in-one supreme god because he combines three Hindu's high gods: Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the Preserver and Shiva, the exterminator. Nowadays, *Pra Trimurati* has become a symbol of love amongst Thai teenagers in Bangkok. The shrine of *Pra Trimurati* is a popular place for Thai teenagers to pray in order to find success in love. At this event, they also displayed their cool and modern identities by using such functions on their mobile phones as the digital camera or video recorder and bizarre ring tones in order to attract

attention. As I observed, most of the teenagers used flip-flop mobile phones with colour screens that they could light up the dark. Some of them used their mobile phones like torches in order to help read the text of the sermon. Furthermore, I saw one group taking pictures of each other with *Pra Trimurati*'s statue using their mobile phones, and then comparing the pictures that they had taken to see whose mobile took the clearest shots. If someone used the video function to shoot a video clip, they were perceived as a high-technology person amongst the crowd.

However, these behaviours could be seen as rude in the meantime, showing a lack of awareness on the part of Thai teenagers, who were acting contrary to the traditionally expected behaviours in these holy places, where people are expected to pay homage in good manners by avoiding shouting, using bad language in front of the sacred object, and using the foot to point to the sacred object. Yet, as I observed, some of Thai teenagers shouted over other people's heads when arranging frame compositions for photos and pointed their feet at the sacred object by accident while other people were concentrating on the sermon and praying. Moreover, they happily screamed at the fabulous pictures they were taking as if the sacred object was just a normal thing and the holy place was simply a tourist attraction. This leads me to another discussion of these behaviours in relation to changes of 'Thainess' in a way in which Thai teenagers perceive as modern.

By this, Thai teenagers have engaged the religion to express their 'new selves' as modern and cool, using the high technology of mobile phones, for example, digital camera, video and Internet functions for interactions in ritual spaces. This allows me to argue that mobile phones serve as a representation of modernity and that the transformation of young people's activities is mediated through virtual communication, which localises ideas, people, places and images in distant contexts. These are interconnected through social networks across multiple sites in terms of time and space distanciation, which will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated consumerist values to highlight the important role of consuming global brands, in particular mobile phones, among Thai middle

class teenagers. More specifically, Sino-Thai teenagers who come from the new rich middle class have cultivated consumerist values by emulating their peer groups in terms of using cool mobile phone brands. In this regard, the evidence demonstrates that taste and style emerge through social patterns. The research has shown that the Sino-Thai new rich middle class has adopted novel fashions and consumed trendy mobile phones in order to maintain their position of superiority, which illuminates some social values of wanting other people to admire their wealth.

In order to qualify their social identity, Thai middle class teenagers use mobile phones as symbols of their wealth and higher status amongst their peer groups; besides, this can also be seen in public settings such as holy places. In this regard, the mobile phone is embedded in Thai teenage culture in relation to ethnicity, religion and belief. Furthermore, this chapter presents an overview of the attitudes of Thai teenagers in relation to their mobile phone experience and practices in their local context (see Thompson 1995). The way in which the mobile phone has represented the idea of modernity and has localised and transformed the urban experience of Thai teenagers in Bangkok will be discussed in the next chapter to show how the modern communication, in this sense the mobile phone, has been used to form their cool and modern identities in the various settings.

Notes

[1] For my thesis, I divided the middle class into two subgroups: the new rich middle class and the median middle class. The distinction of the two classes can be denoted by profession or career, which indicates social status and income. For example, a large proportion of the new rich middle class are of Sino-Thai ethnicity. They have become rich quickly because they run successful businesses. On the one hand, some people who come from full Thai blood ethnicity can also be perceived as rich because they are from old rich elite or noble families. However, most full Thai blood people work as government officers or work in the agricultural sector and are perceived as neither rich nor poor; they are classified here as members of the median middle class. Therefore, the median middle class are actually called the middle class or *Chon Chan Klang,* which is the biggest class in Thai society.

[2] As Gillespie (1995) noted, "culture change is, in a sense, a tautological term in any case. All cultures are lived and therefore always in flux. In fact all cultures are 'hybrid', 'syncretic', 'creolised' or 'impure' and it is changing in encounters with 'other'" (1995:4). To some extent, I have followed Gillespie to look at syncretic

religion in Thai culture. Buddhism is the central religion of Thailand; however, it was first influenced by Hinduism as the root religion of South East Asia. This fits into my engagements in terms of displaying the religious adoption and doing the merit practice of Thai people in their everyday lives.

[3] The western housing estates represent the characteristics of the new rich or upper middle class, who are engaged with the commodity-driven imagery of modernity, such as neoclassical styles, Tudor and California-Spanish styles (see Askew 2002:11).

[4] The snowball technique is a form of convenience sampling in qualitative research. I used this technique to select my research participants. By this technique, some of my research participants, who were representatives of each subgroup, such as the Tween and Teen groups, were asked to invite their friends to join the sessions. From this technique, I could observe the connections within each group.

[5] The girls' group was consisted of 6 people, Koookai, Keaw, Nid, Nat, Kate and Pae, who were focus group participants. The boys' group contained 5 people, namely Vee, Mo, Ton, Bird and Bus.

[6] In the female university students' group, there were 6 people. They were Bee, Keng, Mod, Dol, Nan and Mim. The male university students' group was also consisted of 6 people. They were Dee, Pik, Tee, Champ, Bert and Neng.

[7] Most Thai people believe in the spiritual dimension, such as the spirits and the gods (*Phisang Thewada*). These have become the root of their respect of sacred objects or *sing saksit*. See Mulder (2000) *Inside Thai society; religion, everyday life, change* for more details. In this sense, I adopt consumerism as an aspect of cultural expression of the spiritual culture in that Thai people are manipulated by consumerism and the new rich ideology, which are sometimes sanctified by a sense of religious mission (Pinches 1999).

[8] *Sakdina* is the instiutionalised political, social and economic system whose structure was established during the mid-fifteenth century and linked social ranking and the status of state capital. The *Sakdina* state consists of a *Tas* (labour) system and a *Nai* (master) system.

[9] To exemplify this, 'patrons' are defined as those who have more power and must be respected and obeyed by clients. Put more simply, the junior must respect the senior and this patron/client relationship can be seen in terms of adults/children, employers/employees, the old/the young (Hinviman 1999; Mulder 2000 and Doungphummes 2002). However, the distance of this relationship can be reduced when people use the term 'Pi' to refer to someone as an elder brother and sister, or 'Nong' to refer to someone as a younger brother and sister.

[10] As Veblen (1994) observes, in modern industrial society, the ruling classes no longer display their superiority by the absence of work, but by means of conspicuous consumption. Put more simply, people spend a lot of money intentionally so that others notice and admire them for their wealth. To conclude, conspicuous consumption is a mark of status.

[11] See the appendix 1 for more details on the survey research.

[12] PCT stands for Personal Communicative Technology. A PCT handset looks like a wireless telephone but can be carried everywhere like a mobile phone. However, the signal reception of PCT is not as good as that of a mobile phone.

[13] Sino-Thais are the offspring of Chinese merchants who have traded with Thailand since the reign of King Rama III. They became a powerful group, running the main businesses in Thailand. In Thailand, the middle class Sino-Thais have remained powerful and control giant commercial banks, big department stores, agro-industry and manufacturing. Furthermore, in the present day, Sino-Thais have participated in some political parties and government administration by subsidizing money and help. It can be elaborated that Sino-Thais play important roles in both economic and political sectors in Thai society.

[14] However, another two meanings of Lao relate to the neighbouring country of Lao and also the north-eastern people who have been called Khon Esan or Khon Lao (Lao people). This is because the ancestors of the north-eastern people migrated from Lao.

[15] The events of Thai people and Thai teenagers going to these holy places, for example *Pra Trimurati* and *Pra Prom Erawan,* are shown in the attached VCD.

[16] *Pra Trimurati* is the three-in-one Supreme God in the mythological Hindu deistic rank. This statue of *Pra Trimurati* is a replica of an original figure believed to be the work of an unknown artist of 1350-1767 that was built in 1989. The style is based on classical characteristics found in ancient Indian sculptures with a touch of Thai traditional artistry of the Ayutthaya period. With a human-like body, four arms, two heads and five faces, it symbolizes the three Hindu high gods, Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the Preserver and Shiva, the exterminator, Trimurati represents the god of supreme power. It is believed to be a symbolic interpretation of ancient Hindu doctrines which accentuate the basic fact that everything on earth has its beginning, its existence and finally its ending. Nothing on earth can escape from this ultimate truth of life (Source: carving on the wall behind the statue).

Chapter 3

Localising the idea of modernity

In this chapter, I show how certain modern transformations, known by Thai people as *Khwam Tan Samai* or *Siwilai,* are inextricably bound up with advanced communication technologies such as the mobile phone, the shopping centre and the modern public transportation. The research displays the features which are of modernity by illustrating how Bangkok represents its mobility through sight and sound; it is a city alive with mobile-ring tones and vivid advertising images (Korff 1989; Plant 2001). I show how it generates new meanings and symbols, as well as new institutions and fashions in relation to mobile phone use and the concept of habitus. In this sense, Bourdieu (1984)'s habitus has been central to my interpretation of the research data in terms of how mobile phones are engaged in activities of Thai people and how these form meaning in the urban setting.

The chapter provides details to show Bangkok as a local site of global interactions. I will look at the connections between homes as private place and schools and department stores as public places to demonstrate how these various locations become sites of modernity for my research participants relative to their lifestyles and leisure. I will also examine how Thai teenagers interact with "western" ideas and influences in their own ways in these multiple sites. I discuss some of my meetings with my research participants and the conversation that they have had in these sites to bring out the connection between the formations of modernity and the social transformation of the "city" in Bangkok. The research therefore focuses on the relationships of particular Thai teenagers and places (Bangkok) vis-à-vis the mobile phone with reference to two aspects.

The first aspect looks at the consumption, the representation and the display of mobile phones in two department stores, the *MBK shopping mall* and the *Mall Bangkapi*, in order to show how these matters have influenced the leisure and lifestyles of Thai teenagers in a modern society. The research further concerns the significant role of the

mobile phone as a representation of modernity in terms of offering new global resources in local cultures which have illuminated images and desires around the city (Silverstone and Hirsch 1992; Appadurai 1996; Martin 2003). From this perspective, the research will demonstrate how my research participants have incorporated the idea of modernity through the representation of global brands in terms of viewing advertising images, using modern communication technologies and consuming cool brands in their everyday lives as local forms of consumption in order to display their identities as cool and modern. These become an idea of modernity by showing the characteristics of urban life and the experiences of newness.

The other aspect considers how the mobile phone is regarded as a symbol of the transition of modernity that fits into these modern settings. It considers how Thai teenagers produce the new sense of freedom and new possibilities for the expression of human subjectivity with reference to social interaction vis-à-vis the mobile phone (see Mackey 1997; Silverstone and Hirsch 1992). In examining this, I shall draw upon Giddens's (1990) point of view by looking at the time-space distanciation in terms of how Thai teenagers have mediated mobile phones in their modern experiences with co-presence in the social contact through various type of mobile phone functions i.e. digital video and camera mode. To illuminate, the mobile phone has been involved in the disembedding or displacing of social relationships in modern social life that has been implicated with security, danger and trust (Giddens 1990). In this context, a new form of parasocial interaction through the mobile phone has been investigated in terms of social interaction alongside the settings of modernity (see Murdock 1993). This allows me to consider the way in which the boundaries between private and public spaces have been blurred in relation to the mobile phone use and social coordination of interactions (Ling 2004) that have become part of everyday lives of Thai middle class teenagers in settings of modernity such as Bangkok.

3.1) Bangkok *"Krung Thep"*: Place of *"Siwilai"*

Since its establishment in 1782, Bangkok has continuously developed and transformed into a site of power, status and modernity that generates new modes of living and values through the commodities and images in various periods (Thongchai

Winichakul 1994, Mulder 2000; Askew 2002). From the past, Bangkok has become a site of conspicuous consumption, becoming a cultural capital of "global modernity" (represented firstly by Chinese in the reign of King Rama III, then by the West in the reign of King Rama V). Particularly during the reign of King Rama V (1853-1910), a patron of novelty who opened the doors of Thailand to 'Western influence' and the basics of democracy, Bangkok underwent progressive development in various aspects: telecommunication i.e. telegraph, telephone and print system; the consumption of westernised tastes and styles, i.e. the evening dress, popularity of English styles of home decoration and the dinner table setting in western style; and the new education system, i.e. primary schools, secondary schools and universities.

According to various scholars, Bangkok became a "centre of modernity" in Thai society and was associated with the consumption and appropriation of new commodities, object and symbols. This was contrast to Thai traditional community where people exchanged their necessary things to each other without using money. Later in the nineteenth century, these objects and symbols were seen as exclusively western and the west represented the value and process of *Siwilai,* which was derived from the word 'civilisation' (Askew 2002; Thongchai Winichakul 1994).

Along with the *Siwilai* process, Bangkok has shown continuous growth, with intensive industrialization and the dynamics of modernizing society, which have manifested in social transformations in relation to accumulation consumerism and technology (Korff 1989; Hewsion 1996; Askew ibid). Additionally, Bangkok nowadays conveys the sense of being modern through its tall office buildings, modern skyscrapers, entertainment complexes, big shopping malls, sky trains and subways (which first opened in 2004) as well as the population density and the traffic congestion. Reaching an urban population of 10 million in 2003 and comprising of 50 districts, Bangkok holds the highest proportion of national urban cities in contrast to other provinces in Thailand, and the urban experience has centred in the Bangkok metropolis (www.bma.go.th). This section will show how the urban experiences of Bangkok people have transformed in relation to the modern public transportation, the advanced technology system and the growth of the shopping complexes.

Since the first appearance of department stores in 1930s, the western-oriented retailing patterns have created cumulative transformations in production and in the consumption patterns of urban people, continuously related to their taste for imported goods. They were initially located in Chinatown at *Yaowarat* district and then moved towards the *Silom* or *Surawong* in 1950-1960s. Since the late 1970s, the concept of shopping behaviour among people in Bangkok has progressively changed from retail markets to the idea of 'one-stop shopping' and 'convenience' style department stores. The expanding number of shopping malls that incorporate department stores, supermarkets, offices, banks, restaurants, fast food outlets, bowling alleys and cinemas located in every important crowded area are designed to draw the attention of consumers. Another kind of attention drawing is seasonal sales – called *Khong Thaem* – including incentives such as raffles, and these have become popular phenomena in shopping culture, not only in Bangkok but now everywhere in Thailand (Hewison ibid, Kanithar 1991; Askew ibid).

Specifically, the concept of *Khong Thaem* has now become an established part of the marketing strategy to of the fashionable and the high-technology goods, particularly mobile phones, with a range of attractive promotions. For example, my research participants can buy mobile phones now and pay later with low-rate loans, as well as buying one mobile phone and getting another one free, including free minutes and cheap air time rates. As one of my research participants put it, "*I use HUTCH's mobile phone network because they promote buying a camera mobile phone handset and getting another one for free*" (Male, 21 university student). This is similar to another account: "*I changed from the AIS network to DTAC because DATC counts real time use, even in seconds, and I can talk more and pay less with their promotions*" (Male, 14 years old).

In this regard, Thai teenagers are engaged with the promotional and advertising culture [1] in the department stores where mobile phone advertisers bombard them with global brands for the local markets. Advertising thus becomes a form of popular culture in the assemblage of images and representations that use local culture as a marketing tool in selling products (Malefyt and Moeran 2003). This allows me to reflect upon the process of globalisation of ideas[2] in the local context as modernity is inherently globalising (see Giddens 1990) and is embodied in the advertising, as I will

further discuss in chapter 8. The advertisers attempt to persuade Thai consumers to buy mobile phones to fulfil their modern communication needs in their own ways, and subsequently, they become necessary communicative devices for living in Bangkok. In this sense, the notion of Bangkok as modern has been addressed by various scholars with a view of the advance of communication technology. My research builds on Askew's (2002) observation about Bangkok. He notes that it has been represented in the concept of modernity, which has a highly communicative requirement throughout the city. In addition, Plant (2001) notes that Bangkok is alive to sight and sound mobility with the interactions of mobile phones. According to Korff (1989), "Bangkok in the modernity continuously gives birth to new social groups, new meanings and symbols, new institutions and fashions (1989:9)".

Through these studies, I reflect on the ways that Bangkok as an idea of modernity is given meaning through the ways in which Thai teenagers interact with mobile phones and how these interactions are connected to the efforts of advertisers and the images used to represent mobile phones. I consider that Thai teenagers in Bangkok, who present themselves as being *Khon Tan Samai* (modern in style), engage in and display particular ideas of modernity by wearing luxury brands, consuming imported goods, using modern transportation such as sky trains and subways, spending their leisure time in modern department stores and walking around with mobile phones in their hands. Thus, the city is now marked by various signs and images vis-à-vis mobile phone interactions. Below, I provide ethnographic details.

The sense of place and images representations

I visited shopping centres on numerous occasions as participant observer. On one particular hot Sunday afternoon in January 2004, I walked along the pedestrian bridge with Mo, Vee and Golf, schoolboys from the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, in the famous shopping area of Bangkok, known as Siam. With its good location, Siam has become a central business and shopping location in Bangkok, surrounded by hotels, shopping and entertainment complexes and cinemas and is served by many buses routes and modern sky trains. Numerous shopping buildings are gathered in Siam, such as *the MBK shopping mall, Siam Discovery, Siam Square*

and the *Centre point,* which are popular shopping areas for Thai people and Thai teenagers, especially at the weekend and on the bank holiday.

On the way to *the MBK shopping mall,* Mo, Vee, Golf, my research participants in the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, and I walked through the pedestrian bridge that encircles the *Siam Discovery,* a new posh entertainment complex and the *Bonunza Plaza,* a trendy and cheap fashionable shopping mall for university students. This pedestrian bridge has links to the sky train station so people can alight at the *Central World Plaza* and the *Geysorn Plaza,* two fashion centres for imported goods, on Rachadamri Road. Furthermore, at the next station they can alight at Chid Lom Road, where two famous shopping centres are located, the *Peninsula* and the *Central Plaza.* Additionally, the *Emporium shopping mall,* the luxury department store and entertainment complex for rich people, is located on Sukhumvit Road.

From the pedestrian skywalk way, I had a stunning panoramic view of these shopping areas with many giant billboards that exclusively promoted various mobile phone handsets and mobile phone operators such as AIS, DTAC, Orange and Hutch. Some interactive vivid advertising images presented the sense of modernity that is aspired people to have become modern in the urban setting. Even along the sides of the sky trains, the air-conditioned buses and taxis or the *Tuk Tuk* (tricycle taxis) have become mobile advertising channels, painted with AIS, DTAC and Orange symbols or the Hutch logo. In addition, many of the billboards for mobile phone handsets provided spectacular presentation techniques to attract attention. On my right hand side, a billboard for the latest Panasonic mobile phone was brilliant with a good composition between the product and the presenter, illuminated with neon lights at night. It was presented by *Jay Chou,* a Taiwanese singing superstar, who wears fashionable clothes as if he were in a cold country. His hair was dyed, coloured and gelled. He looked charming and very attractive, imposing in a cool position and holding the advertised mobile phone, Panasonic X70, in hand.

That's Jay F4, one of my research participants said, *he is very popular in Thailand. Look! There is a young man using exactly the same model as Jay (Vee, 17 Years old).* But another one said, *Anyway, I think the Nokia Engage or O2 XDA or Inno stream is hotter at the moment (Mo, 17 years old).* There were other arguments about issues related to mobile phone handsets amongst the friends. Thereafter, one of my research participants said to me in person, *that's why I don't want to come to this place, because I'm not confident with my out of date mobile phone. You will see that most of them have got the newest ones and dress in fashionable styles (Vee, 17 years old).*

My research participants above demonstrate views of Siam as a source of fashion and trendy things, such as clothes, accessories and technologies for Thai teenagers, who associate their fashion with the images of advertisements, shop displays and billboards. Additionally, they can get fashion ideas through other people's appearance and styles, as well as using or adopting goods that are available in the marketplace to associate with their identities. This account is supported by other materials and fieldwork observations which allow me to generalise this account related to views by other scholars to suggest that "people use the mall as part of their own daily and weekly rhythm, and for the fulfilment of their everyday needs (Lehtomen, Turo-Kimmo and Maenpaa, Pasi 1997:145)." Furthermore, "these representations become part of people's constructions of their own identity and of their relationships within or across generations, providing metaphors, frameworks, explanations or dimensions for

social comparison between self and other (Lunt and Livingstone 1992:102)." Thus, going shopping for Thai teenagers has become a pleasurable social activity in urban setting in the sense that they are engaged in the shopping activities by stimulating their imaginations and searching for inner experiences.

In this context, I argue that Bangkok is informed and shaped by images and processes implicated in globalisation. This and other materials such as the mobile phone TV commercials bring out the idea of Bangkok as a modern city reproduced through consumption and the image representation, in addition to the globalised media, for instance TV, radio, cable TV, MTV and the Internet. This encloses accounts of Thai teenagers' consumerist tendencies with a view to simulate excessive demand for global goods in local contexts (Sulak 1991; Lewis 1998 and Sumsuk Hinviman 1999).

When we passed by the mobile phone advertising billboards in the *MBK shopping mall*, my research participants always mentioned these advertising billboards in relation to the TVC commercials that they saw in their homes. Most of the conversations revolved around the look of the presenters and the new technology of mobile phone handsets. *I like the idea of One2Call, the prepaid service of AIS, which shows the expression of the new Thai generations. The ads imply that Thai teenagers should not be shy and coward; in contrast, we are brave to do the good things,* said Mo. Meanwhile, Golf added, *nowadays the mobile phone technology is more advanced and more fashionable. Sometimes I cannot keep up with these fashionable mobile phones, even though I change my handsets quite often.* This is similar to an opinion of Vee, who said: *now I am desperate to change my mobile phone, as I have seen an advert for the Nokia 7610 (a smart phone within the High End fashion category). It has more mega pixels and night mode camera. It would be cool if I could have it now and walk around Siam.*

Not surprisingly, every weekend, most Thai teenagers display themselves as cool and modern by getting dressed in hip hop or fashionable styles to hang around in Siam, with trendy mobile phones in hands as my research participant noted. To show off their sense of being cool to others, they make phone calls facing the crowd. They can walk, use escalators and eat or do any other activities while they are talking on their mobile phones. Seen in this regard, the fashion of brand name clothes and trendy

mobile phones are elements of the cool identity for Thai teenagers, particularly in Bangkok. As one of my research participants puts it, *"the mobile phone has become part of my body, like the clothes that I need to wear all the time. When I forget it, I have to go back home as soon as possible to get it because it annoys me a lot when I keep worrying about who might be calling me today while my phone is away* (Male, 20 years old, a university student).

Within the modern consumer culture, Thai teenagers are now speaking not only with their clothes, but also with their mobile phones, which are to be read and classified in terms of the presence and absence of taste (Featherstone 1991). One of my encounters in Siam Square can demonstrate on this matter.

While my research participants and I were walking along the street in the Centre Point, Siam Square, we always saw groups of young women and men who got dressed in fashionable clothes, wearing the mobile phone necklaces and holding the latest mobile phones in hands. There were a few observations finding that few people who looked trendy held the obsolete mobile phones in hands. If their mobile phones were not beautiful or lacked hi-technology, I saw these people keep them in their bags or their trouser pockets. Additionally, they were unlikely to be willing to make a phone call facing the public. This is related to one of my research participants who expressed the same view: *If you want to observe which of the latest mobile phones are hot, you have to go to Siam. Most of the teenagers who walk at Siam will be the first people who use them* (Golf, 17 years old).

Not so far, we reached in front of a McDonald's restaurant. They said their favourite fast food restaurants to hang out with their friends after school or at the weekend were the McDonald's and KFC. This was similar to most Thai teenagers in the *MBK shopping mall*, who were likely to sit at fast food restaurants like McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Starbucks and KFC to show off their cool identities. While passing these restaurants, I could see some of them putting their mobile phones on the table or hanging them round their necks with coloured straps or holding it to make phone calls. Obviously, these mobile phones were beautiful and hi-tech. When various weird ring tones rang, I heard sounds like thunderstorms or a sound of a tuning radio. These ring tones attracted the crowd who were curious to know whose ring tone were

coming out. However, Mo (one of my research participants) said, *I like to compose the ring tones on my mobile phone. It makes me different from others.* In this sense, to be different from other could be signified as the cool and modern person for Mo. But Vee (17 years old) responded, *Hey, do you know now we can listen to popular songs instead of the calling sound. But you have to call the AIS mobile phone service centre to register for it. Uhm, that's good; it is not boring* - said Mo.

In this context, the mobile phone as a symbol of global icon is embedded as a new form of communication and a new meaning of self-identity, which is significant for Thai teenagers in the context of modernity. Kellner (1992:141) states, "identity in modernity becomes more mobile, multiple, personal, self-reflexive and subject to change and innovation. Yet identity in modernity is also social and other-related. " To elaborate on this point, the mobile phone brings the sense of newness and convenient lifestyles to Thai people, particularly Thai teenagers. They present themselves as being cool and modern into the public space by using the hi-tech mobile phones. Furthermore, they have new experiences in communicating to each other with co-presences by GPRS function. As I observed, Golf, Mo and Vee, my research participants with me at the MBK shopping mall always used their mobile phones to find each other when they got lost. Additionally, when they could not find the places they were looking for, they used the mobile phones to get information or to search the location. My fieldwork experiences can explain this.

We approached the Fuji restaurant in the MBK hall. Fuji is a famous chain of Japanese restaurants with many branches in big department stores in Bangkok. Today, we decided to lunch on Japanese food because Mo, Vee and Golf were eager to lunch at this restaurant rather than on other junk foods such as Pizza or KFC, or Thai food or MK Sukiyaki. As they said, *"Japanese food makes me feel special rather than those restaurants because it is expensive and yet you pay for me Ha Ha Ha (laughing). "* In my view, Japanese food such as that of Shabushi buffet or Oishi restaurants has become a new and popular trend in the eating-out culture of Thai people, and is incorporated with their leisure activities in the modern city. This allows me to show the connections of Japanese food with social transformations of the city and the lifestyle patterns of people in Bangkok in that it involves spending time in the big department stores after work or school in the week and during the weekend and

brings out the new form of experiences amongst Thai teenagers, especially my research participants.

However, initially, they could not find this restaurant. Mo asked Vee to use his mobile phone to call his sister, who often spent her leisure time in the *MBK shopping mall*, as she might know where it was. Unfortunately, Vee's mobile phone had no signal. As he said, *my mobile phone always dies in the shopping mall because my Thai-mobile network is not efficient in covering crowded areas*. Then, Golf suddenly excused himself by saying; *my credit was running low, sorry*. Later, I saw him used the GPRS mode from his Nokia Engage to search where the Fuji restaurant was. Meanwhile, Mo also lent his mobile phone to Vee instead. We eventually found the Fuji restaurant by asking Vee's sister for the direction, and this was the same as the icon's map retrieved by the GPRS searching. This shows the mobile phone to be a source of reference when help is needed or other opinions are involved in Thai teenagers' everyday lives. When they need to go out, the mobile phone has thus become a necessary communicative device to confirm meeting places and to reduce the anxiety from the heavy traffic in Bangkok. This is in contrast to the past, when Thai teenagers had to wait in long queues to call friends from telephone booths. The social interaction vis-à-vis mobile phone between Mo and Golf can be demonstrated in this light.

Golf always comes late when we go out to buy something or to the cinema. Thus, the mobile phone is necessary when we need to keep in touch. Mo said to me while we were waiting for Golf. This was because I drove to pick up Mo and Vee at home, while Golf came with his father, who had some business to do near Siam. Mo called Golf twice to check his whereabouts when we arrived at Siam. When we met, Golf apologized to everyone: *Unbelievable! Traffic jam on a Sunday. I spent almost two hours to get here. Normally, it takes 45 minutes.*

Mobile phone as social coordination in modern city

It is not only these research participants who give importance to their mobile phones in association with their social activities, but most Thai people of every social status also engage their everyday lives with mobile phones. In examining how everyday life of different classes of people in Bangkok involve with the mobile phone

use, my material builds on observations in the crowded settings in Bangkok to show how mobile phones serve as a symbolic modern lifestyle accessory reflecting the communicative patterns and changes in lifestyle patterns in relation to the relationship between communications and the formation of modernity in a modern city.

In Siam square, my observation illustrates that not only do the white-collar workers have mobile phones, but also the blue-collar workers such as sellers in the department store or on the street, bus drivers and security guards use mobile phone for their private and business issues. Even the monks use mobile phones for temple businesses. Specifically, in Bangkok, the mobile phone has made the flow of business more convenient. The motorcycle taxi drivers at the end of the Siam Square Soi 1 (a narrow street off the main road) give out their mobile phone numbers to their regular customers; the sellers on the street receive phone calls for food orders and delivery. This can illuminate the impact of globalisation within the local context in which Thai people have integrated mobile phones to enhance their better lifestyles.

In this sense, the mobile phone is an inspirational object, explicitly linked to the fast-moving pace of modernisation (Harkin 2003). As the figures show, the number of mobile phone subscribers would appear to demonstrate an upward trend so far [4]. Moreover, the increasing mobile phone subscribers peaked at 15.7 millions in 2002, while the growth rate of mobile phone diffusion has been calculated at 97.7 percent (Internet magazine 2003). In Bangkok, people have not only engaged in mobile phone communication in their everyday lives, but have also developed new cultural communes and virtual interaction through the mobile phone rather than literal proximity in the information age (see Castells 1997). To elaborate, in everyday life particular Thai people and Thai teenagers use mobile phones to overcome emergency problems that may arise at any time. The communicative functions of mobile phones can be illustrated by the following tale of urban life with the traffic jams in Bangkok.

> One day my car broke down on the bridge at Kasetsart intersection while it was climbing nearly to the top of the bridge. Suddenly, I decided to stop my car with the handbrake because the car could not move in automatic gear. It caused a severe traffic jam because cars behind me could not pass; there are just two lanes for inbound and outbound traffic.

Unfortunately, I had no credit on my mobile phone; therefore, I could not contact anybody. After my shock, I tried to call 191(emergency call) even though I knew my credit had run out. At that moment, I was sweating while I was waiting for somebody to answer the phone...ring ...ring...ring.... "Hello 191, can I help you?" Oh, thank you. It seems to me it was like a sound from heaven. I think mobile phones are very useful in this situation and are also helpful for the people who have cars. It is a worry when you drive; you have to keep your mobile phone nearby because you don't know when your car will break down. (Male, 30, freelance tutor)

As noted, the notion of the mobile phone represents the characteristic of urban life in terms of using hi-technology to solve their problems in various settings in Bangkok. More specifically, the mobile phone can also be regarded as social coordination in terms of time appointment and keeping contact in Thai families. In general, my research participants support the view that mobile phones are convenient ways for parents and children to communicate with each other in the modern city. One of my research participants in primary school maintains, *normally, my mum will call me on the mobile phone to tell me that she is on her way or that she is stuck in a traffic jam somewhere. It is useful for me* (Schoolgirl, 11 years old). In this case, schoolchildren find ways to avoid the anxiety between parents and them. In effect, parents used mobile phones to reduce their worry and concern. As the parents of my research participants stated:

I think parents buy mobile phones for their children because they are worried and we cannot predict the time to pick them up from school because of the traffic jams. (Male parent, 40 years old)

I bought a mobile phone for my son in order to check where he is and when he will come home. Bangkok society nowadays is more dangerous (Mo's mother, 42 years old)

This illustration of the modern city experience both personal and impersonal in various social settings allows me to connect how Thai teenagers generate their new lifestyles that tie up with the use of high-technology communication to facilitate their quality of life. The term 'virtual communication' can be exemplified here through the use of picture phones or video phones to present perceivers with experiences in real time and place through telepresence as a new form of mediated interaction in modern city (Featherstone and Burrows 1995). By this, Thai teenagers have experienced 'virtual communities' with their connections between social relations and the formations of modernity in the settings of modernity, such as homes as private places or schools and department stores as public places. They thus transcend the virtual communication through the various forms of mediated interaction by the mobile phone rather than face-to-face interactions (Thompson 1995: Ling 2004).

In this sense, mobile phones provide the new possibilities for communication without time and space, and intimacy. Also new forms of sociability are generated through mobile phone use (Murdock 1993). My focus group participants illustrate this point: *I received photos from my friends, who greeted me from another province during summer vacation. With the picture mode, I could share experiences with them and I could feel their happiness* (Nan, 20 years old, a university student). And another one demonstrates: *With the function of 3G technologies via wireless Bluetooth, I can see the face and action of my friend in the real times* (Bert, 20 years old, a university student).

Up to this point, I shall shift to consider the connections of the mobile phone use as social coordination in the modern city and the social activities of Thai teenagers, especially in the department stores to maintain the theme of modernity. This allows me to demonstrate the way in which Thai teenagers distinctly construct and form their different self expressions through mobile phone uses at two department stores. Additionally, the research shows how Thai teenagers enter the spheres of leisure and consumption of mobile phone to uphold the social relationships within peer group and family.

3.2) The MBK shopping mall and The Mall Bangkapi

This section brings out my observations on the fact that department stores or shopping malls in Bangkok have become ritual spaces[5] where the ideas of modernity are generated through new fashions and new identity groups of Thai teenagers exhibiting themselves. Additionally, the *MBK shopping mall* and the *Mall Bangkapi* have become places where the needs and desires of Thai teenagers have been exercised through their everyday, routine consumption activities. At these department stores, I observe that Teen groups like to do the window-shopping at weekends, as well as other leisure activities such as dining at Japanese restaurants (Shabushi and Fuji restaurants) and the Swensens ice cream parlours after school. Particularly in the *MBK shopping mall*, interviews with the owners of mobile phone shops were undertaken to gain further insights into Tweens' and Teens' shopping behaviour.

In examining the question of how the mobile phone is associated with the styles and desires of Thai teenagers, I have drawn upon my observations and interviews with my research participants. They are Mo, Vee and Golf who like to do the window-shopping at two department stores in Bangkok, the *MBK shopping mall* and the *Mall Bangkapi*, and other teenagers who walk around there. This is to discuss and demonstrate their shopping and their relationships towards brands of mobile phone and mall congregation (Michman et al. 2003). In doing so, I explored how the distinctions between Tweens' and Teens' mobile phone purchasing and their forms of consumption express their identities. This allows me to provide the description of two department stores to exemplify in this regard.

I arranged to meet three schoolboys from the Teen group (Mo, Vee and Golf) at the *MBK shopping mall* to go mobile phone shopping. The *MBK shopping mall is* a famous place for mobile phone shopping because it gathers a lot of mobile phone sellers and buyers from throughout Bangkok. This gives consumers many choices, and people enjoy trying and testing the mobile phones on offer. The *MBK shopping mall* is situated in the business area known as Siam. Siam has also a lot of shopping buildings such as Siam Discovery, Siam Square and Centre Point, which are popular shopping areas for Thai teenagers. Siam has become a key leisure location in Bangkok, rather than public parks or homes.

Thus, going to the *MBK shopping mall* to shop for mobile phones is a special time for my research participants (Mo, Vee and Golf), who live in another district, Bung Kum. It is far from the *MBK shopping mall* more than 50 kilometres. However, going to the *MBK shopping mall* is the new excitement for them. This is because the *MBK shopping mall* gives them the opportunity for new experiences with other teenagers who dress in fashionable styles that are different from their styles, and they can access fantastic mobile phone outlets. As they tell me, the *MBK shopping mall* provides a variety of choices in the mobile phone shopping. The *MBK shopping mall* is the best places for Thai teenagers to observe each other's use of mobile phones. This is because the *Mall Bangkapi* has fewer mobile phone outlets than the *MBK shopping mall*.

On the other hand, if they want to gather around with friends for eating some food or buying something, Mo, Vee and Golf prefer to go window-shopping at the *Mall Bangkapi* rather than the *MBK shopping mall*. The reason for this is that the *Mall Bangkapi* is located near their school and crowded with school students from other schools nearby. As I observe, the *Mall Bangkapi* attracts people with lower salaries and middle-class people who come to dine and entertain with friends while they are waiting for the traffic to calm down. My research participants explain why the *Mall Bangkapi* has become a more familiar place for them.

First, I describe the atmosphere in the *Mall Bangkapi:* the mobile phones shops are gathered on the third floor. These include famous operators' shops, including customer service centres of AIS, Orange, DTAC and Hutch. However, there are not as many private outlets as found in the *MBK shopping mall*. Vee likes to negotiate prices and to window-shop at the mobile phone outlets here. As he said, *I get the information off the Internet first, and then I compare the prices and the models that they have in the shops. Sometimes, I bargain until they want to sell them to me at the lowest price, but finally I can't decide. I like to seek the model that is cool and is suitable for me.*

Mobile phone shopping has become a pleasure-seeking activity for Thai teenagers by means of adopting a lifestyle or creating an identity. This observation builds on Campbell's contribution that mobile phone shopping "may serve to fulfill a wide

range of personal and social functions. Furthermore, they commonly serve to satisfy needs or indulge wants and desires in seeing other people used mobile phone. In addition they may serve to compensate the individual for feelings of inadequacy, insecurity or loss or to symbolize achievement, success or power. Thus, mobile phone shopping also commonly serves to communicate social distinctions or reinforce relationships of superiority and inferiority between individuals or groups, especially Thai Tween and Teen teenagers (Campbell 1995:111)."

In this regard, the modern identity is best understood through the image of consumption. That is, the mobile phone may be instrumental in creating or confirming an individual's sense of self or personal identity. As I observed, my research participants choose styles or models of mobile phones that are relevant to their experiences and preferences and that are hi-tech and modern. These styles of mobile phones can be encountered as part of the need to construct and maintain self-identity (see Slater 1997). In this context, the relationship between shopping experience and mobile phone displays in the outlets draw upon their desires of buying mobile phones. In doing so, mobile phone shopkeepers in the *MBK shopping mall* were interviewed, and they revealed insights into consumer behaviours in relation to their experiences.

> Our customers are from different classes. Most of them are teenagers. Some of them are high-school students, who are 13-15 years old. They bring a lot of cash with them. So, when they find the newly arrived models that I display for them, if they are satisfied, they immediately buy them. On the contrary, adults find it hard to make decisions even if the price is reasonable. Interestingly, girls prefer to buy the new models rather than boys. This is because boys always keep changing their models, so they wait for the price to come down. – (Note, 21 years old, salesman from a mobile phone outlet at the MBK shopping mall)

According to this view, Thai teenagers of different genders have mediated their mobile phone shopping according to styles and tastes of mobile phones that are in trend. This is relevant to another shopkeeper's view in this regard.

Now, the mobile phone styles which are hot and popular are those with colour screens and digital cameras. Customers are likely to look at what the mobile phone functions are. For example, how many mega pixels of colour there are in each model: the more mega pixels a mobile phone has, the more they like it. The pixels show the sharpness of pictures that they shoot, although these pictures are shot while moving. From my experience, teen girls like the beauty of technology, such as shape and colour. For teen boys, they prefer the functions the mobile phone has. (Tee, 21 years old, salesman from a mobile phone outlet at the MBK shopping mall)

After an hour of window-shopping, Mo and Vee found a model of mobile phone that they liked. However, it was hard to buy a new one immediately because of the lack of money and because their current phones, despite being out-of-date, were still functional. However, they liked to look at the various styles of mobile phones. If they wanted to buy a new one, they had to save up money from their living allowances. This is related to the nuances of function and necessity as well as the luxury and modernity in terms of mobile phone use among Thai teenagers as I will describe more details in chapter 5.

Mo: I get 2,000 baht per month and I have to save 1,000 baht a month for five months if I want to get a Panasonic PD51 (it costs 5,500 baht). The rest of the money I have to spend only on necessary things, without going out with friends after finishing class as usual.

Vee: However, I like to go window-shopping sometimes if I have time because it becomes a pleasure activity that I don't have to pay for it. Anyway, I find it quite hard to make a decision to buy anything when I don't have money.

Shopping centre as my third home

In this section, I will further demonstrate the significance of the shopping centre for my research participants. The *Mall Bangkapi* in particular has become their

third home which means the third place apart from home and school as the first and second places, respectively, rather than the *MBK shopping mall*. I discuss my observations and other ethnographic material below.

At the lunchtime on a hot and humid Sunday in December 2003, I drove my pickup truck to *the MBK shopping mall* where I had an appointment with three school boys (Mo, Vee and Golf) of Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School to do some mobile phone shopping. The *MBK shopping mall* was chosen because one of my research participants, Golf, suggested that it was the famous place for mobile phone shopping. Furthermore, there were more than 300 outlets selling mobile phones. However, when I called Vee to make an appointment to go to MBK, he said *"I only want to go to MBK, not Siam Square, because it was shame to have old-fashioned mobile phone and walked around Siam Square. You will see most of them have got the newest ones. While I still have this one, I will never, ever go there. But if I go there, I will keep it in my bag, not holding it in my hand."*

Vee did as he said; he kept his mobile phone in his white shoulder bag. I noticed that Mo and Vee were dressed normally in T-shirts, jeans and sandals. Compared with my research participants, they wore stylish clothes in hip-hop style with many decorations like silver strap belts, baseball caps and sneakers. Furthermore, they had the latest mobile phone styles to explicitly make a phone call. This allows me to demonstrate the meaning of style of Thai teenagers' subcultures in expressing their modern identities. The aim is to point out why Siam Square becomes the sources of street fashion in Bangkok. However, this is different from my research participants who get dressed normally as they perceive themselves as *Khon Tummada* (normal people) of which the meaning I have noted in the previous chapter. Therefore, their styles look different from *Khon Tun Samai* (modern people) who get dressed in fashionable style at Siam Square.

This reason can explain why my research participants (Mo, Vee and Golf) prefer to go shopping at the *Mall Bangkapi,* which is located near their school, rather than the *MBK* shopping centre. They often go to the *Mall Bangkapi* rather than other department stores because they feel more comfortable with their dressing styles and the model of their mobile phones. Furthermore, there are entertainment complexes,

banks, amusements, a giant swimming pool and a cinema. It could be noticed that the *MBK shopping mall* and the *Mall Bangkapi* have become marks of class distinction and taste among Thai teenagers (see Corrigan 1997) [6]. Mo, Vee and Golf shared their shopping experiences with me, comparing the shopping at the *MBK shopping mall* and the *Mall Bangkapi*. They stated that the *Mall Bangkapi* was their third home, rather than the *MBK shopping mall*. As Mo put, *usually, we like to go to the Mall Bangkapi because it is near our houses. I can buy some drinks and snacks in McDonalds or KFC before having dinner at home. MBK is the best for the special days like special bank holidays or long weekends or when I go shopping with my parents. Because there are so many expensive shops, we cannot afford it.* (Mo, 17 years old)

Up to this point, Mo's opinion is matched with Vee's opinion in terms of their comfortable feelings with the *Mall Bangkapi* rather than the *MBK shopping mall*. As Vee maintained, *I feel comfortable at the Mall Bangkapi rather than the MBK shopping mall because I walk through the Mall Bangkapi almost every day. I like to go window-shopping even if I don't buy anything. Most students in my school always come here after school. It looks like we can meet each other here at other times. I like the second and third floor of the Mall Bangkapi where they sell the mobile phones. You know I like bargaining, as if I wanted to buy, but I don't* - (Vee, 17 years old). However, the pleasure of mobile phone window-shopping of Vee seems different from Golf's opinion as Golf feels that he can get the special prices from the MBK shopping mall rather than the Mall Bangkapi. As he expressed in this regard,

> I bought this Nokia Engage at *the MBK* from my usual shop. They can give me advice on mobile phone information. They always offer me special discounts. I always go to *MBK* because I study a tutorial course at Siam, which is near *MBK*. It is a long way from my house, but my father does business around there, so we can go together and then we can have some dinner at a restaurant before going home. – Golf

This connection of the different atmosphere of the *MBK shopping mall* and the Mall *Bangkapi* demonstrates the same perspective of how social relations of consumption are constructed through shopping mall as a site of consumption which is chosen as a

representative. In other words, it is a symbolic relationship of products and social groups (Campbell 1995). This allows me to draw upon my observation with Panwad Wilaiporn, 15 years old, one of my research participants in the Teen group, who gave her opinion about the reasons why she and her group of friends view the Mall Bangkapi as their third home: where they always spend their evenings and weekends in there.

> *The Mall Bangkapi* is like my *'third home'*; every weekend when I am finished with my tutorial course, I always hang around here before going home. On weekdays, I come here again after school finishes: to walk, to shop, to eat snack, to see movies. These are the activities that I do with my close friends. Sometimes, we take pictures in the photo studio, or sometimes we visit the mobile phone shop to get more information about the new models of mobile phone. My life has three places, home, school and department store (Panwad, 15 years old).

In this regard, department stores can be seen as 'the third home' in terms of family spaces where families or teenagers spend their leisure time outside home together. In particularly, the modern family's lifestyles in Bangkok have engaged in various activities in the department stores. Furthermore, it becomes the place where family raise their children at weekend. This can be illustrated by the account of *Due*, a 10-year-old Tween boy, and his family who like to stay at the department store all day on Sunday in order to do own favorite activities.

At the weekend, *Due*'s parents always take him to hang out at a famous department store to shop or window-shop and buy some food or do their own activities. Later on, they like to have lunch or dinner at Fuji restaurant, a Japanese chain restaurant. This is because Japanese food is *Due*'s favorite. For Thai teenagers, Japanese food can signify the wealth and richness status because it is expensive. After that, his family separates to go shopping. His father likes to see the technology shop like the stereos, computer games and mobile phones. After that, his father always teaches him about how mobile phone function operates. His mother goes to see the clothes shops and the kitchen utensils shops. Sometimes, *Due* does shopping alone because he likes to spend his time at a computer game shop for a very long time. When his mother

finishes her shopping, she calls him at his mobile phone and his father's mobile phone to arrange the meeting at the meeting point before going home.

On the other hand, Thai teenagers are likely to spend more than two hours hanging around at these stores with their friends after school and they might spend their entire weekend there without their families. These observations are made based on the work of Glennie (1995), who argues that department stores are pivotal sites of cultural appropriation and identity construction, through their ability to create the meanings of commodities and consumers. Also, people who use department stores naturalize everyday encounters with consumer goods through two intertwined processes. First, the use of department stores inspires knowledge and skills among consumers through demonstrations and specialist shop staff. Second, consumers employ the creative display of commodities as spectacles with promotional images that have constituted their imaginations. Briefly, consumers use department stores which can be understood as exhibition halls that present spectacular representations of commodities.

This literature provides the connection of the department store as a third home and how Thai teenagers make use of department stores to relate to their self identities. In examining of how my research participants develop the process of consumer socialisation in making choices and purchasing goods through their styles and uses (Gunter and Furnham 1998), I shall draw upon my observation of Tai, a 17-year-old schoolgirl at the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, to demonstrate this point.

> Even though the *Mall Bangkapi* is the third home where I spend my leisure time with my school friends after school, it does not offer me new excitement. To me, I like to hang around at the Japanese gift shop at Siam Square. At the shop, I have experienced the beautiful accessories and the novel fashion from Japan. When I buy something unique and odd and show it to my friends, they made me feel that I become the sources of new fashion among them. Sometimes I bring my school friends to shop around there because I study a Japanese course near Siam Square. – Tai noted.

From the above account, Thai teenagers search for their identity from their favourite shops and they create their pleasures with the peer group activities in terms of commonly going into shops to look at, touch and talk about goods (Gunter and Furnham ibid). That is, the department stores are taken as a ritual place of a religion in the sense that most Thai teenagers gather in these areas to engage in their own activities and spend time together for shopping meditation. One reason for this is that it has become evident that shopping as a pleasurable leisure activity sometimes does not require a great amount of money. Thus, my observation with my research participants suggests that Thai teenagers are likely to engage in window-shopping with friends rather than active shopping, particularly in the fashion area like the MBK shopping mall and Siam Square. As Corrigan (1997) states, shops do not provide only commodities, but also sweet dreams at the same time. Additionally, the shopping styles of consumers can be differentiated by the level of products, which may be perceived as high class or low class.

This literature allows me to provide for the understanding of why my research participants perceived *The Mall Bangkpai* as their third home where they engage their leisure activities mostly with friends. The reason for this is they feel more comfortable with their styles and tastes of dressing, especially their mobile phones when they compare themselves with other young people in Siam Square. Meanwhile, they would prefer to go to the *MBK shopping mall* when they want to seek their pleasures from the window-shopping and get the source of fashion reference.

As has been shown, my research brings out the evidence of my research participants enjoying their peer group activities in two department stores to demonstrate their modern lifestyles at the weekend and the way in which they are likely to involve window- shopping rather than active shopping. Furthermore, I thus argue that the spaces of homes, schools and department stores can be regarded as displays of identity in terms of cultivating and promoting leisure activities of consumer culture through the increased accumulation of styles and tastes of mobile phone use. To further examine this, the spaces of homes and schools will be more specifically investigated in terms of how Thai teenagers generate new meanings and symbols, as well as new institutions and fashions in relation to mobile phone use and the habitus in the next section. This allows me to consider the consequences of modernity for

social interaction among Thai teenagers in Bangkok vis-à-vis the settings such as home and school.

3.3) The Settings of Modernity

- ### _Home_

This section aims to unfold the notion of mobile phone interactions in the household as a part of modern setting and the relationship of Thai families in the modern city in order to illustrate how the urban life experiences of my research participants are bound up with the mobile phone and how it is related to family relationships. In doing so, the research shows that the mobile phone serves as a relationship tie amongst family members in Bangkok, as well as providing a sense of sociability and socialisation in the private and public sphere that reflects family values and family cohesion (see Blum-Kukka 1997)[7]. On the other hand, the mobile phone can be regarded as a social withdrawal by its functions such as video, game and MP3 modes that seem to be made children and parents far away from their family activities. In this context, I consider how Thai people, and particularly Thai teenagers of this research, have incorporated mobile phones as a local form of domestic consumption that is associated with the cutting edge of social and cultural change in modern households (see Hirsch 1992).

In developing this argument, I view the family as the major social institution in Thai society that shapes social norms and social values in the family members, in particular Thai teenagers (Nithet Tinnakul 2003). It can be said that the home has been a sociable and warm place with face-to-face communication between parents and children in terms of having breakfast, dining, chatting and watching TV together. Today, home is an empty area that lacks warmth because parents have to work more to afford the high living cost in Bangkok.

Like other modern cities across the world, there has been a transformation of family structures, with growing numbers of single parents or patchwork families in Thai society, especially in Bangkok. The population and housing census of Bangkok between 1990 and 2000 indicates that the average household size has reduced from 4

people in 1990 to 3 people in 2000; in the same way, the number of female-headed households has increased from 28.6 percent in 1990 to 32.6 percent in 2000 (www.nso.go.th). This reflects upon the social relationships within families in terms of spending time together and joining family activities, which have declined. And subsequently, this may cause children to have to stay alone more than before. The gap between parents and children is growing but is also filled by the mobile phone. These mobile phone interactions have become part of modernity in the urban experiences.

In this context, the mobile phone has been inserted into households in Thai society as the relationship ties to make parents and children get closer and cope with their conflicts. On the other hand, the mobile phone is also perceived as personal entertainment devices amongst Thai teenagers that withdraws the family cohesion. For example, Thai teenagers have social interactions with their mobile phones i.e. talking on mobile phones and playing games in their leisure time at homes rather than watching TV with the families' members or doing any activities together such as dining or chatting. This allows me to reflect upon a form of social withdrawal in the home as a result of mobile phone technologies as Murdock mentions as new forms of parasocial interaction (see Murdock 1993). Here, the parasocial relationship can be used further to explain social responses toward mobile phone in the sense that Thai teenagers can create these interactions by referring to their imagined relationships with celebrities – people they do not know and will never meet.

My empirical data from the interview show that Thai teenagers like to stay in their private rooms to chat with friends or make new friends via MSN, discussing general topics about school or their daily lives even though their family are still outside their rooms. On the other hand, they enjoy talking via the mobile phones, especially about secret things, with close friends who they could trust. As one of my research participants says, *after dinner, my family separates to do their own business. I go to my room and talk with some of my friends. We talk about guys and gossip about other friends in our gang - things we can't talk about in school. I always switch on the mobile phone even it is charging the battery* (Girl, 14 years old). This is similar to another research participant, who expresses this; *my parents always come home late and eat dinner together outside because they work together. I have dinner with my grandmother. Afterward, I keep myself in my room and do my own activities. One of*

these activities is chatting on the mobile phone with my Gig (Boy, 14 years old). This can illuminate that the mobile phones have been inextricably bound up with parasocial interactions by Thai teenagers in the home as part of a modern setting. It can also be demonstrated to the imagined relationship of Thai teenagers who have experienced with someone called *Gig*.

Apart from these accounts, I shall also draw upon a finding that mobile phones can be understood as playing a major role in modern society in helping parents to keep in touch with their children while they are working. In the same way, they help parents to monitor their children's behaviours outside the home. However, warmth may be experienced differently as regards to social relationships. The accounts of my research participants will support how parents and children maintain their family relationships through the mobile phone.

In Golf's family, his father and his mother have been divorced for several years. Golf lives with his father, who sometimes has his girlfriend to stay. His mother lives with his younger brother in another house. Thus, Golf visits and stays with his mother at weekends. But it does not mean the sociality and warmth between Golf and his mother has gone. This is because his mother calls him on his mobile phone every day to ask him about his daily life and especially his father's behaviour. As Golf said, *sometimes I get annoyed with my mom; she wants to know everything. Sometimes, I lie to her about my father's behaviour. But I know she cares for me and my father.* Golf's account shows how his mother cares and tries to give warmth to him but Golf act in contrast to his emotion that he does not seem to be interested in his mother. As I observed, Golf is quite closer to his father than his mother because his father sometimes picks him up at school and invites his friends to join dinner. Regarding Golf family's account, Thai traditional social norms have been changed in the context of modernity in that children have to take turns staying with mum or dad for a short term during the weekend like in the western family. Thus, the necessity of mobile phone use in the urban life to keep in touch with family's members in Thai family can be understood as a transition to modernity and one of social transformations in Thai family structure as a result of social change.

Mobile phones: Keeping in touch

In Bangkok, many families' members have their own mobile phones [8] in order to contact with each other every day for various purposes as in civic cities. In this respect, people in Bangkok become more anonymous and highly individualistic. Subsequently, this brings out the notion that mobile phone has been involved in the disembedding or displacing of social relationships in modern social life that has been implicated with security, danger and trust (Giddens 1990). For example, parents use mobile phones to make and confirm the appointments, to check when their children are coming home and to arrange a pick-up of their children from school, as well as to monitor when their children have met new friends. In this sense, Thai people living in Bangkok now rely on the mobile phone as a safety line to reduce their risk and danger. As a result of other social problems, for example, drugs, child rape and kidnapping, the mutual relationships between Bangkok citizens and their mobile phones have increased, especially among family members. Focusing upon this regard, my research will show how the social interactions vis-à-vis mobile phones have been implicated with security, danger and trust in the modernity setting, especially in homes. One encounter of my fieldwork experiences in terms of using the mobile phone to contact my research participants at home can support this.

One afternoon on January, 2004 after I met the schoolgirls group at St.John School, one week later I called them to make a rapport and to make further appointment following their mobile phone numbers that were given. However, one of the mobile phone numbers given became the mother's mobile phone of one girl, *Kwang*, a 14-year-old. She shared the mobile phone use with her mother because she did not have her own mobile phone at that moment. As she said, *I was cut off because my bill exceeded the promotions.* Thus, when I called *Kwang* through her mother's mobile phone number, I was detected from her mother with many questions about my status and my purpose of calling to contact her daughter, and so forth. This allows me to provide for the connections of security, danger and trust of people in Bangkok and their interactions vis-à-vis mobile phones when they have met a stranger. An example of conversation between Kwang's mother and I can demonstrate here.

Kwang's Mother: Hello

I: Hello … Is it *Kwang*'s number?

Kwang's Mother: No, it's her mother's number.

I: Oh…But Kwang gave me this number and let me contact her through this number…. May I speak to her?

Kwang's Mother: Who is calling? (Emphatic voice)

I: Well…I am one of her senior friends who has ever talked with her at school.

Kwang's Mother: Who are you? (Using a bit angry voice)

I: Oh I'm sorry. My name is Aor (my nickname): I am PhD student who interviewed *Kwang* and her peer group about the mobile phone interactions at her school.

Kwang's Mother: Ok…I'll put you through wait a moment.

Up to this point, this conversation shows the distrust of Bangkok people towards the strangers has increased; particularly when they used mobile phones for contacting people at the first time. Mulder (2000:49) explains the characteristics of Thai people in the modern age in the sense that "in interaction with non-intimates persons, people most often perceive each other as potentially harmful, because real intentions are often kept hidden." From this reason, the social relationships between *Kwang*'s group and I have a bit changed from that day. I feel that *Kwang* was warned about my contact by her mother to be aware of deceiving issue in the modern city. I am sure of my feeling when I find that Kwang's group never shows up on the date of appointment.

Apart from the issue of danger and trust of urban people that are engaged with the mobile phone interaction, the security issue is also fit into another encounter of my fieldwork experiences to demonstrate the way that Thai family keep in touch with other members through the mobile phone. This allows me to show that the mobile phone serves as the worried line amongst family's members in Thai society.

While I was driving to drop Vee at his house, Vee received an incoming call from his mother to check where he was, and he said he was with me. His mother wanted him to go home early because she was going to do her business with his father and Vee's younger sister (11 years old) was at home alone. As soon as he got the call from his

mother, he called to check his sister at home. Unfortunately, the telephone line was engaged. Vee tried to call her several times until he was able to talk with his sister. Vee was very worried about his sister and blamed her for the telephone being engaged. As he spoke to his sister, *hey...what are you doing? Why was the telephone line engaged? I will be with you in 15 minutes. Lock the door yet? Etc.*

From Vee's account, this provides evidence that Thai families nowadays are bound up with the mobile phone interaction to increase one's security (Ling and Yttri 2002). This allows me to further illustrate my argument in the sense of how Thai teenagers use the mobile phone in cementing intimate family relationship through virtual communication in order to present the new form of modernity (Murdock 1992 and Claire Lobert-Maris 2003). To elaborate on this, my research participants save their family members' pictures in their mobile phones to look at later when they miss them. Thai teenagers can attach pictures of callers to incoming calls. Thus, they can see these pictures with the ring tones and also with the ID of the person who is calling. As one of my research participants in the Tween group puts it, *I can set the picture of the callers to appear with the different ring tones. My favourite ring tone is assigned to close groups like family members, relatives, close friends and school friends* (Girl, 14 years old).

In this respect, Thai teenagers have brought about an extension of intimacy incorporated with their mobile phone uses. Not only are the family relationships associated with the mobile phone, but also the relationships within the peer group, especially the special friends called *Gigs* can be facilitated by mobile phones. One of my research participants in the Tween group puts it as follows:

One day, I talked on my mobile phone with a Gig (in this context, it means a person who like to date with several people), who I've just met two or three times. We know each other mostly from talking via the mobile phone. Every time, we spend five hours chatting. We took turns to call when his battery ran out. My mobile phone can be used continuously for 3-4 hours. When I talked with him, the time passed very quickly. Even when I took a shower; I used the speakerphone function to speak with him. Finally, he couldn't stand the sound of

water, so he gave up. Then he called later when I finished my shower (Tabb, 14 years old).

In this regard, the boundaries between Tabb's private and public settings are blurred. The mobile phone technologies allow him to use the speakerphone function or Bluetooth wireless to continue his conversation (Habermas 1981: Thompson 1995). Even at night, he regularly receives phone calls from his close friend who was unable to sleep. Tabb, who never switches off his mobile phone, feel odd when he does not receive incoming calls from anyone in a day. This is relevant to my argument showing that Tabb like other Thai teenagers has experienced the new sense of freedom in terms of using mobile phone to express his feelings and to coordinate his everyday life. As he maintains, *If I didn't talk with someone, I would feel that I was lacking something in my life. I mostly like to use my mobile phone to chat with friends. For movie preview, I seldom download movie previews because it is expensive. I prefer to download ring tones and send pictures to friends. My billing per month is a promotional package from AIS, so I have 1,500 free minutes per month. Sometimes, my billing is over 3,000 baht. I use my mobile phone like adults do* (Tabb, 14 years old).

Tabb's account is similar to the findings of my survey. The figure of 55.5 percent of respondents says that they switch on their mobile phones 24 hours a day, so they are always available for incoming calls. Specifically, most of them spend an average of two hours per day talking on their mobile phones (see in Appendix 2). In this sense, not only does the mobile phone bring some sense of intimacy and private possession, but it also brings some sense of responsibility for Thai teenagers in terms of paying the bills and being aware of losing their mobile phones. As one of my research participants states, *I have just got the new mobile phone from my father. I had been punished for several months because I lost my old mobile phone in a taxi* (Male, 17 years old). This is similar to another participant, who states: *I have to limit myself on calling because my bill is excessive now. My parents tell me to take a responsibility for my own billing, which I save from my living allowance* (Girl, 16 years old).

Up to this point, the above account demonstrates the way Thai teenagers interacted with their mobile phones in the household. Thus, the next section will show how another modern setting in public space, school, has influenced on the use of mobile phone amongst Thai teenagers in relation to taste and styles of mobile phone. This reflects upon how Thai teenagers express their modernity through the cool brands.

- ## _School_

My research participants were Thai schoolboys and schoolgirls in both public and private secondary schools in Bangkok. The Tween group was observed at the St. John school, a private secondary school in the Jatjujak district. The Teen group was observed at the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapan School, a public secondary school in the Bung Kum district. When I decided to do fieldwork in the St. John School and the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapan School, I contacted both of the key research informants by calling them from my mobile phone to explain how I would conduct my fieldwork. At first, my key informants did not understand the nature of my research and how my fieldwork would be conducted. As Ajarn (master) Siriprakai Sombutsiri (or Jee, which was her nickname) who was a teacher at the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapan School, said, _"I think your fieldwork sounds very difficult. I have no idea how to explain this to my students. Anyway, I can make an appointment for you to meet my students and I will tell them you want to interview them about mobile phones. Then you can tell them what you want later"_. The first entry of my fieldwork at the St. John school occurred in the same way. Dr. Nuntiya Doungpromma, who was my senior colleague at Cardiff University and Thammasat University, helped me to contact a teacher in the St. John School[9].

At the schools, I observe that the Tween and Teen groups in both schools express their self-representation as cool, fashionable and modern with their mobile phones in different ways. Apart from the variety of social interactions with mobile phones to coordinate everyday events, the teens also show them off as status symbols and markers of wealth. The differentiations of sexes, classes, environments and subcultures of Thai teenagers have been investigated in order to ground my particular understanding of habitus. In this sense, Thai teenagers in the private and public

schools generate different tastes and styles of mobile phone use amongst peer groups, as I will further discuss in chapter 7. For example, most of the students in the public school cannot afford expensive mobile phones. As can be seen, at the seven public telephone booths in the Bangkapi Sukhum Navanpan School there are always long queues at lunchtime. However, the favourite places in both schools where Thai teenagers were likely to show off their mobile phone handsets are the school canteen, the classroom and the playground.

The St. John school is located in the Jatjujak area. The school is a Christian private primary and secondary school of medium size with less than 1,000 students. Students have been divided into two parts; there is a boys' school and a girls' school. However, for some courses, like English sessions and the computer laboratory, they have to share common facilities. The school has a big canteen for serving food and beverages. Also, it has a big convention hall with 1,000 seats with air conditioning and a playground, as well as a basket-ball field and a volleyball field. Additionally, the school provides many activity rooms for students to participate in activities of their interests (i.e. the cheerleaders' club, the music club and the acting club). Most of the students come from wealthy families and their parents have high social status and are often school alumni. This is because the tuition fees are higher than those of other public schools in Bangkok. In this regard, the private and public schools and the reputation of school can be linked to the social status and class distinction of Thai people. In other words, education, especially western-style higher education, has been of great significance for the Thai middle class (see Hewsion 1996).

Contrary to St.John school, the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapan School is a public school located in the Bangkapi area in the north part of Bangkok. It is about 30 kilometres from Jatujak. This school is a unisex school and has more than 1,500 students. Some of them are exempt from tuition fees because their parents are government officers, so the government pays for them. Furthermore, the tuition fee is lower than the St. John school. Therefore, the facilities are not as good as those of St. John school. As such, the school has big twin buildings with five storeys for 1,000 students and five small temporary teaching buildings alongside the football field. The lunch period is divided into two sittings: the first is at 11.30 a.m. for the junior secondary students and the second is at 12.30 p.m. for the senior students. This is in order to prevent the small

canteen from becoming overcrowded with students. Unlike the St. John School, the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School uses the ground space in the open air between the twin buildings as a convention hall.

The distinctions of two schools allow me to show the connections that Thai teenagers at these schools have social interactions with their mobile phones in terms of expressing their cool and modern identities through the model and style of mobile phones and the social coordination of mobile phone use so as to show different cool selves. In this sense, mobile phones are used in both schools to connect with their families to arrange a pick-up or to chat with friends in other schools. According to my survey, 80 percent of respondents say that the main purpose of using mobile phones is to contact parents. 75.5 percent say that they used their phones to make appointments and 70.3 percent say that they used them to chat with friends. 47.3 percent use their phones for consulting on study issues. Furthermore, the favourite places for students who want to make mobile phone calls are those private and quiet places, such as on the corners of classroom buildings. This enables me to demonstrate how the mobile phone has entered into both public and private spaces where Thai teenagers blurred these boundaries in terms of finding some public place to make their personal or private callings. However, mobile phone use in school is ubiquitous, being seen in canteens, on the ground floor of classroom buildings and in playgrounds.

Cool brands

This section builds on my argument on the basis that the mobile phone as a global icon has fit into a public space like school where Thai teenagers use cool brands to present the cool selves. To elaborate, Thai teenagers perceived cool brands as fashionable items rather than communicative devices. In this regard, the social emulation to consume the cool brands can be referred to the peer group influences. The signification of friendship and the network of relationship among teenagers are now reliant on the mobile phone use. The account given by Tabb, 14 years old, from St. John School, who is one of my research participants, can illustrate this.

Every day, I have to get at least one incoming call or more than that. If I have not got it, I feel a lack of something...like nobody or no friends are concerned about me, and I

feel lonely. This allows me to consider a space for warmth amongst peer groups. Tabb said this to me when I met him after school, surrounded by his friends. Tabb also mentioned friendship with his peer group: *we always make mobile phone calls when we get home. In my group, there are 6-7 people and everyone has got a mobile phone. Just last night, Tarr (one of Tabb's close friends) called me because he could not sleep and we talked until after midnight. Mon always calls me when he has questions about his study or his routine life, such as, - hi Tabb! Which school uniform should I wear tomorrow? Uhm...Boy Scout uniform Ok. Bye- or- hi Tabb! This is Mon again...Do we need to print out our reports tomorrow? Ok...I'll print it, OK see you.* This is because Tabb is the class representative. He is quite proud of his importance to his friends.

When I met Tabb and his group of friends again at the canteen at lunchtime on one day in February 2004, I was invited to join their table. It could be noticed that mobile phones were partly used for personal matters at the canteen. Some pupils put their mobile phones on the table so that they could hear the ring tones and especially so that they could show off the latest model of mobile phone they have to other people. This was obvious in Tabb's account. Tabb selected the loudest blizzard ring tone. Even though the surroundings were noisy, we could hear his ring tone, which attracted a crowd. It seemed to me that Tabb felt a bit embarrassing when he picked up the phone, but I knew he was proud of his mobile phone - a Sony Ericsson P800. As he said, *"Everyone knows this ring tone is mine. In this school, there are only a few people with the same model as mine.*

In this regard, these teenagers demonstrate how fashion and taste have played important roles in the purchase of mobile phones amongst their peer groups. The middle-class groups of students are as obsessed by affordability and price as they are by coolness. To support this point, I therefore show the images of mobile phone providers in reflecting how Thai teenagers incorporate the meanings and uses of mobile phones into practice and contribute it into their peer groups. During their lunch breaks, the Tween group[10] continuously chats about issues related to mobile phone purchase, the latest models of mobile phone, promotions and the quality comparison between different services of mobile phone providers. From their opinions, they are

likely to prefer different aspects of mobile phone service providers. Their following conversations can illustrate this view.

Tabb: I like AIS-GSM Advance because its signal is strong and more powerful even in the countryside, in lifts and in the mountains. Orange and Hutch are not good signals, while DTAC is ok.

Tarr: I use HUTCH even though it is not a good signal. This is because Hutch launched many cheap mobile phone handsets. Thus I use it.

Bin: Now, I use DTAC; before that, I used AIS (One2call). My mum thought AIS had an expensive air time service so she changed it to DTAC because it calculates the air time rate per second.

Mon: I use Hutch as well, because it offers a cheap mobile phone handset. I don't care about its signal because I rarely use it. My sister always uses mine to talk with her friends for a long time because my airtime rate is cheaper than hers.

In this regard, my examples show the values and attitudes of the Tween group towards the image of products, which can generate social distinctions regarding their socioeconomic status. Evidence can also be drawn from a relevant literature of the cell phone use in the upper and the middle-class Jamaicans. It shows schoolchildren's internal competition over status based on obtaining the latest phones with the most advance facilities (Horst and Miller 2006:71).

This literature can be related to the patterns of shopping experience of Thai teenagers in the department store in terms of the fact that they also have the power to buy high technology such as mobile phones more quickly than adults. School becomes an important place in the sense of marking their coolness where Thai teenagers show off their mobile phones immediately after purchasing them. This is differing from homes spaces in terms of Thai teenagers used mobile phones to maintain the social relationships with peer groups and parents. In particular, parents employed the mobile

phone to keep in touch with their children so as to reduce their anxiety about the risk and danger in urban society, in vice versa.

As I observed, students in school hold the newest mobile phones in hand to make phone calls. Examples of those trendy mobile phones include picture phones with colour screens, games phones (i.e. Nokia engage), FM stereo phones etc. Most of them following the trends of mobile phone fashion. For them, they see mobile phones as necessary items, not just as fashion accessories, despite the fact that many students buy mobile phone follows friends and fashion. This is related to my argument in the sense that these meanings of 'necessity-luxury' and 'fashion as a symbol of modernity' are problematic amongst Thai teenagers. That is, they change their mobile phones in the same way as they change their clothes. Aspects of mobile phone consumption are varied regarding the image of products and services, including their use experiences. This allows me to explore the cool culture at both schools by looking at Tween and Teen subcultures, which I will do in chapter 7.

Conclusion

In this chapter, certain forms of transformations into 'modernity' in Bangkok can be seen in the modern transportations, the media representations and the advanced communication technologies such as the mobile phone, all of which are inextricably bound up with Thai people's everyday lives in various localities. The argument shows that certain Thai teenagers and their families in Bangkok engage in the modern way of life through using mobile phones to enhance the visible form and promote the degree of time-space distanciation enormously. Moreover, Thai teenagers assimilate the view of modernity in the process of globalisation and localisation by making a reference to the representation of images.

Put another way, Thai teenagers have localized the idea of modernity in relation to the mobile phone in various settings in Bangkok. They show that the department stores can be regarded as ritual places that exhibit the idea of modernity through the representation of images and shop displays. The relationship between shopping and young people is a fundamental social transformation as it is engaged in the pleasurable social activities. This provides for the understanding of consumer culture

and consumption as a feature of modernity. Furthermore, fashion and taste have been viewed as a means of expression engaged with the forms of identity in modernity (see Chaney 2002).

This chapter demonstrates that both of public spaces such as department stores and schools and the private space such as homes have become important settings in which mobile phones play a symbolic meaning rather than a communicative function. The reason for this is the obvious social emulation and cool brand competition amongst friends. However, homes can also be understood as a setting in which mobile phones are relevant in everyday life as social coordination. That is, they are used in order to keep in touch with families or bond the family cohesion in the modern culture. For instance, parents use mobile phones to reduce their anxiety about the risk and danger that may occur in Thai society. In the same way, Thai teenagers use mobile phones to mediate their security and trust with friends, as well as to maintain their relationships. More specifically, homes have become places of virtual communication that families use in connecting with each other in the modern city like Bangkok. My research suggests that Thai people and Thai teenagers in particular have adopted mobile phones to reinforce the achievement of the modernization process. This allows me to further discuss the connections between mobile phone technology according to G1-G3 technology and modernity vis-à-vis the social interaction of Thai teenagers, which will be explored in the next chapter.

Notes

[1] In terms of promotional culture, Wernick (1991: vii) focuses on promotion that it is a rhetorical form diffused throughout culture. The promotion has come to shape not only that culture's symbolic and ideological contents, but also its ethos, texture, and constitution as a whole.

[2] Arjun Appadurai (1990) has touched upon this issue with the notion of 'ethnoscapes', 'mediascapes', 'technoscapes', 'financescapes' and 'ideoscapes', in global cultural flows.

[3] To compare the penetration rate in 2000, the number the mobile phone subscribers has been growing at about 46.2 percent (3.6 millions of mobile phone subscribers

increasing). Thereafter, in 2001, penetration rate rose sharply, by 118.4 percent (an increase of 7.9 million mobile phone subscriber).

[4] To some extent, I follow Delaney's (1992) contribution regarding the Canadian museum of civilization (CMC) as a ritual space in which to exhibit a site of consumption of a prescribed national identity.

[5] Corrigan (1997) states that, "shopping became quite a different experience in the department stores; prices were fixed, there was free entry and anybody's coin was as good as anybody else's. However, department stores provided the material means for the new middle class in particular to stake out a cultural identity for themselves (1997:50)".

[6] To some extent, Blum-Kulka's (1997) study "Dinner talk; cultural patterns of sociability and socialisation in family discourse", has influenced my thoughts in terms of whether mobile talk can be perceived in the same way as sociability and socialisation in public and private spheres.

[7] According to my survey, almost 50 percent of Thai teenagers said their families' members had their own mobile phones, and 40 percent had 2-4 mobile phone handsets in their households.

[8] This is because her workplace, Saint John University and the Saint John School, are in the Saint John group, which is comprised of the Saint John kindergarten, Saint John school, International Saint John School, Saint John commerce, Saint John Polytechnic and Saint John University. Dr. Nuntiya introduced me to Ajarn Tim (her nickname) who was a teacher in Saint John School. Ajarn Thippawan Makgulchorn or Ajarn Tim is a Thai traditional dance teacher in Saint John School. She made appointments with her students to be interviewed by me after school during December 2004.

[9] For the Tween group, I observed schoolboys in the St. John school. They were Tabb, Binn, Tarr and Mon, whom I have provided more detail in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4

Displaying mobile phone technology

This chapter considers how 'newness'[1] as a demonstration of modernity emerges through the use and display of mobile phones. I will discuss how this concept interrelates with Thai people's ideas of the advance technology of mobile phone by bringing out how Thai teenagers have interaction with mobile phone alongside the progression of Thai society. Besides, I draw on technological changes and the advent of capitalism as part of the context to examine how people understand and help to constitute these various forms of modernity (see Swingewood 1998). By discussing these technological changes in relation to communicative patterns, I will explore the various forms of newness experiences (i.e. mediated and quasi mediated communication) of Thai teenagers through the development of mobile phone technology alongside the various generations (i.e.1G, 2G, 2.5G and 3G) of mobile phone. It argues that these periods are relevant to Thai teenagers in constructing their identities vis-à-vis mobile phone technology and integrating it with their everyday lives. It further considers modern daily living and the mediation of experience through the interaction of global cultures with local cultures in settings of modernity like Bangkok (see Thompson 1995; Sreberny-Mohammadi 1996; Appadurai 1996)

Thai teenagers' choices and actions, which have active interactivity with technology – in this sense mobile phones, have relevance to the social shaping of technology (SST)[2] approach as a perspective on modernity interactions in the context of globalisation. To further demonstrate the interrelationships of potential human agency and social diffusion in relation to mobile phone use, I shall begin by presenting a brief history of the emergence of mobile phone technology. I argue that this 'modern technology' of the mobile phone, is heavily implicated in Thai society and especially in the urban setting of Bangkok. These materials illustrate the different choices of particular social groups in terms of mobile phone use specifically among Thai teenagers. They see the mobile phone is as a status symbol and as a potential trend-setter with which Thai teenagers find ways to signal their exclusivity (Skog 2002). For example, Thai teenagers use SMS and MMS as symbolic clues and tools of cool

intimacy respectively in expressing feelings and showing the sense of modernity that has become part of their social lives.

This allows me to show that Thai teenagers have social interactions with their mobile phones and their communication extends to new dimensions in terms of confirming trustworthiness with image and sound. Investigated in this context also are the ways in which their choices of cultural capital factors are generated through various technical facilities, such as WAP (Wireless Application Protocol), GPRS, pictures and video clips, designs, ring tones and brands in order to create their new expression of identities. Furthermore, Thai teenagers have to show their maturity in looking after their mobile phones in order to prove their responsibility so that their parents will allow them to upgrade to more high-tech mobile phones next time and maintain their trendy and cool image. The responsibility of Thai teenagers is fit into my argument in such a way that Thai teenagers can pursue various forms of newness experience to display their cool and modern identities.

As well as being a source of both information and entertainment data, the mobile phone has also become a new form of cultural consumption in itself. Thai teenagers have taken into account the transformations of mobile phone technologies in relation to integration technology, which offers new capabilities that enable them to extend the available choices for connectivity and new patterns of activities, as well as intimacy (Miles, Cawson and Haddon 1992; McCarthy and Miller 2003). In this sense, mobile phones as symbolic goods have become part of the construction or formation of people's identities in the sense of purchasing mobile phones and using them to display themselves. Furthermore, pagers and PCT (Personal Communication Telephone), the alternative communication technologies, are also studied alongside mobile phone technology in order to discuss how these mobile communication technologies represent different senses of 'modernity' in terms of modern, hi-tech and cool images with regard particularly to Thai teenagers.

4.1). 1G: Unaffordable Mobile phone

In Thailand, the mobile phone was first introduced in 1986 by the Telephone Organization of Thailand (TOT), a state enterprise, which is responsible for

Thailand's household telephone and telecommunications services. The first analogue mobile phone network, with a 470 MHz Nordic Mobile Telephone[3] – the so-called "Portable Mobile Phone" – was introduced into Thai society. Additionally, the first true mobile phone model in Thailand was sold under the brand name of 'Nokia Mobira' and weighed 7 kilograms, like a cooler tank or a brick, with a very high price. Thai people in general perceived the emergence of the mobile phone as luxury technology that they could not afford. Therefore, Thai people back then rarely possessed mobile phone handsets and they were not a feature of their everyday lives. Only the elite, businessmen and the government sector could afford them. Elite Thai businessmen carried these portable phones as if carrying big briefcases. Although its size made it unfavourable and inconvenient to carry, the mobile phone was perceived as indicative of social status with respect to its high price.

As Vivat Prateepchaikul (www.bangkokpost.com 2002:1) puts it, "in boom years, nouveau riche stock-market speculators brandished handsets the size of bricks and costing up to 100,000 Baht as symbols of their success". Thai people not only signified the mobile phone as a status symbol, but they also used these phones in a Thai political revolution in the form of the so-called 'middle-class' revolt in May 1992. This event illustrates the significance of the middle class as a social force in Thai society in leading politics and consumption. The picture of the Thai middle class using mobile phones to arrange appointments to protest against the government is described in Hewison's (1996) observation. He notes that "the image was of the demonstrators in Bangkok as middle-class protesters, with the Volvo or Mercedes Benz parked nearby and mobile phones in hand, challenging armed troops" (1996:137).

Being a new innovation in this stage, the image of the mobile phone in the first generation was seen as unaffordable technology that was incorporated into the moral economy of social class distinction (see Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 1992). By examining this, the household is a moral economy because it is an economic unit, which is involved through the productive and consumptive activities of its members, in the public economy. At the same time, however, it is also a complex economic unit in its own terms (Paul 1990 cited in Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 1992). In this regard, different households in a contemporary society will share elements of their

moral economies according to their positions within social structure and a basis for identity of households. This engagement involves the appropriation of the mobile phone use in a domestic sphere as the phones are domesticated technology. Moreover, through that appropriation the mobile phones are incorporated and refined in different meanings, along with the household's own values, interests and consumption (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 1992: 16). More details about a connection between the mobile phone technologies and the moral economy of the household will be further discussed in chapter 5.

To discuss this point in terms of moral economy, Thai people in general make 'high-involvement' decisions corresponding to the consequences of time and financial investments, including technological literacy in terms of the acceptance of innovations (Rogers 1986; Green 2001). This aspect is relevant to Thai people's adoption of the mobile phone as an example of high-tech and expensive communication technology in their everyday lives. As a consequence of the high-involvement nature of this decision, the small business of mobile phone table service in shops or in front of private houses appeared widely in both urban and rural areas in Thailand in order to share expensive mobile phones and solve the problem of these phones being seen as unaffordable. Most Thai people who did not own mobile phones used these mobile phone table services to deal with their domestic business and international trading [4] rather than using fixed-line [5] telephones, which were seen as an inefficient technology. However, extra fees on top of the calling rate must be paid when using the mobile phone table service. My thesis points out that there is a relationship between mobile phone technology and people (society) in terms of how people adopt technological changes and how they use this technology to facilitate their lifestyles. This engagement allows me to show that every stage in the generation and implementation of new technologies - in this sense, the mobile phone - involves a set of choices between different technical options. Significantly, these choices could have differing implications for society and for particular social groups (Williams and Edge 1996:857).

To elaborate, as a consequence of the high price of handsets and the limited technology when they were first introduced, it was several more years before mobile phones achieved pervasive adoption amongst Thai teenagers. Furthermore, mobile

phones were perceived as unaffordable technology [6] for teenagers whose families did not allow them to possess these phones. In brief, the mobile phone was seen as luxury and was preserved to belong to rich people or adults following its first inception. This finding shows the sample case of the moral economy in the household that is relevant to Mr. Santhi Konkhum, a 21-year-old university student and a participant in my focus group, who shared his experience with the high price of mobile phones as an unaffordable phone: "*in the early days, I recall that the mobile phone was very expensive for people of my age. The mobile phone was used for the family business; only my father used it for dealing with business. I was not allowed to play with it, only to receive phone calls. Thus, at that time, I used a pager, which I thought was a luxurious item. That was because the mobile phone handset cost about twenty or thirty hundred thousands Baht and I could not afford it.*"

Most Thai teenagers not only could not afford the high price of mobile phones, but also they did not want to adopt the brick-sized mobile phones in their everyday lives because they were not convenient to carry. This issue is also supported in Mr. Santhi's case. As he further put, "*it looked like a big dog's bone or a big cooler tank. My father had one, and he still keeps it at home as an antique. Before that, it worked like a fixed telephone line because it was too heavy to use as a mobile. Thus, I did not see any differences from the fixed telephone line, except that we could use it in the car.*"

Owing to these problems, mobile phones did not initially gain wide popularity amongst Thai teenagers. To illustrate, I shall draw upon an account from one of my research participants to demonstrate why mobile phones subsequently achieved pervasive adoption amongst Thai teenagers. The reason for this was the launch of reasonably priced mobile phones in the marketplace. As *Neng*, one of my focus group participants, put it, "*around 1996 or 1997, the Motorola mobile phone came onto the market at a reasonable price. My first mobile phone was a Motorola Star TAC on AIS, at the end of senior high school. You know, in terms of the design of the Star TAC, it was smaller and it had a flip-flop cover, which was very cool for me at that time. Also the price was affordable*" (Neng, a 21-year-old university student).

According to this account, the adoption of mobile phones at that time was a further indicator of representations of modernity in terms of creating one's image as a

cool and modern person with a convenient lifestyle in a modern society (Vivat Prateepchaikul ibid). The reasons for this are that rather than using public telephone booths and fixed-line telephones, most Thai teenagers prefer to make calls from their mobile phones even though the price is higher. My research participants recalled their experiences in using public telephone booths when they did not have their mobile phones. *Bee*, a 20-year-old female university student, one of my research participants, provides her comment in this light.

> When you have got a mobile phone, it seems that everything is much more convenient. I used to call from the public telephone booth. You know, I spent more than fifteen minutes or maybe even an hour waiting in long queues, and sometimes the public telephone was out of order or it ate my coin. These kinds of thing were a bit annoying. Even though I know the public telephone is much cheaper than a mobile phone, on which I have to pay five baht per minute, I prefer to call from my mobile phone. Calling from the public telephone does not work for me. (Bee, 20 years old, a female university student)

This account allows me to discuss that the middle class group of students are as obsessed by affordability and price as they are by 'coolness'. This is related to another account of *Bert*, a 22-year-old male university student who is one of my research participants. He shows that the mobile phone has become a convenient communicative device for his daily life. As he indicates, *"one day, my mobile phone was cut off. I had to use public telephone booths to contact my friends. I had to exchange coins at a shop to use in a telephone booth. Some shops refused to change my money unless I bought something from them first. When I put in the coins, some telephone booths did not work. It brought me a lot of trouble. I thought to myself, "I will never ever let my mobile phone get cut off again"'* (Bert, 22 years old, a male university student).

The emergence of Pagers: a popular choice for Teens

"I started using a pager when I was at secondary school because it was suitable for me and the size was compact, receiving texts in the Thai language.

Afterwards, I started to use mobile phones when I studied at university because I found that the pager caused a lot of problems in communication. Furthermore, the mobile phone promotions were attractive at that time" (Dee, 21 years old, male university student). The idea of using a pager is related to other focus group participants' comments in the sense that they started off using pagers and then moved on to PCTs (Personal Communication Telephone) or mobile phones when they grew up or could afford the modern technology. As Santhi, one of my research participants, adds, *"at the beginning of senior high school (Mathayum Suksa See), I used a pager instead of a mobile phone, which cost just about four to eight thousands bahts. My father told me that a pager was suitable for Teens but that mobile phones were for adults"* (Santhi, 21 years old, male university student). These accounts allow me to display the significance of Thai teenagers' choices in order to use pagers alongside the generations of communication technology in this sense the emergence of mobile phones with 1G technology vis-à-vis the alternative communication devices such as pagers and their relationships with the age of users and the perceived appropriateness of these devices.

A few years after the first inception of the mobile phone[7], the paging radio service (Pager), which had similar functions to SMS, was launched by the Phone Link Company and the Pack Link Company in 1990 so as to serve low-income groups and in particular teenagers (Unnop Khuntikul 2002). Furthermore, pagers received better signals than mobile phones in both rural and urban areas at that time. Most Thai people who did not want to miss their contacts preferred to carry both mobile phones and pagers. Therefore, the pager became a popular communicative device on the move, with a reasonable price that Thai teenagers could afford. With its small portable size and colourful cases, Thai teenagers preferred to attach their pagers to their bags and belts, where they could be seen by the public. The significance of Thai teenagers interacted with these cool images is brought by Dol, a 21- year- old female university student and a research participant who notes, *I used a pager as my first communicative device. At that time, my friend and I attached pagers to belts. So, many people can see we had different colours of cases. That was cool for us.*

Additionally, pager technology was found to be much easier to be used and cheaper than mobile phone technology in terms of the functions, applications and airtime

rates. Users just left their messages with the operator service, and then the messages were typed and transmitted to a destined screen with a beeping sound. When I was studying at Thammasat University, the beeping sounds of pagers signified popular and busy people. It was considered cool to receive messages on the move and then show them to others. When I was a university student, relatively few students owned pagers. Additionally, a student who had a pager was perceived as a special person who was distinct from others, because many students still queued to use telephone booths. As a personal example, when one friend in my group got a pager, other friends liked to leave messages on his pager with the intention that he would pass these particular messages to other friends. I often heard his bleeping sounds. When he looked at his pager, sometimes I saw his friends hanging around him to look at their messages. In this light, he became a significant person, taking the role of a postman, while guarding other people's secrets. This brings out the sense of newness experiences shared among Thai teenagers.

Thus, the pager, rather than the mobile phone, was the most popular communicative device amongst Thai teenagers during 1993-1997. After 1997, however, the pager was rarely used amongst Thai teenagers. My material shows that most Thai teenagers found that pagers were not sufficiently interactive and were inconvenient to use in instantaneous situations. As one of my research participants put it, "*it was annoying to get a message and be unable to communicate or reply immediately. It is better to be able to type your messages yourself or speak to others instantly* (Mim, 21 years old).

According to this account, my research suggests that mobile phones are preferred to pagers because teens find it more flexible to communicate with each other by typing through the SMS function, which they can use in the same way as a pager. This allows me to show the connection of newness and the intimate relationships of Thai teenagers in terms of showing new resources of identities in the modern culture, as noted. Furthermore, they can text to friends anything that they want, and their friends can send text messages back without the censorship of pager operators. As one of my focus group participant mentions, *some words were not polite; they could not type them for me. Some sentences were too long; they paraphrased my text and sometimes misunderstood the gist of the text* (Dee, 21 years old). In this regard, the pager was seen as one-way communication, which caused many communication problems

between senders and receivers. Thus, Thai teenagers found that pagers were not very useful and they soon became obsolete. This is reflected by one of my focus group participants, who shares his experience of the inconvenience of pager use when compared to the mobile phone: *sometimes I got wrong messages from the operator services. I was very puzzled about these messages. It was not convenient for me because sometimes I had to wait for a long time at the telephone booth to call back to people who had paged me. Thus, I used the pager for a few months, but then I bought a mobile phone* (Bert, 22 years old).

For all these reasons, Thai teenagers started to use mobile phones more widely than before. They found that the mobile phone provided a new dimension in communicating via both voice and messages in a way that allowed them to control their own communications and keep in closer touch with a device that was more intimate than the pager. However, it still took time for mobile phones to achieve popular adoption among Thai teenagers because they found it difficult to find network signals in some areas. That was because the coverage was not yet nationwide and the 1G technology of mobile phone was being developed. Accordingly, Thai teenagers found that the functions and features of mobile phone with analogue technology had limitations in designs. For example, these mobile phones could not display caller identification and could not use the polyphonic ring tones, while the price was still high. The connection of Thai teenagers' choices in relation to the construction of identity i.e. being cool and modern people, with alongside the technological changes from 1G to 2G mobile phone technology can be demonstrated in this regard by Champ's account, one of my research participants in the focus group.

Champ, a 21-year-old male university, shared his experience alongside the changing from using a pager to a mobile as saying I *also started with a pager when I was in Petchaburi province. Afterwards, I came to Bangkok to continue for my bachelor's degree. My father bought my first mobile phone, a Sony Ericsson T20, for me to keep contact with him. He perceived the mobile phone as a two-way communicative device; this is related to my view that it was seen as cooler than the pager. At the beginning of testing the DTAC's signal of 2G technology, DTAC allowed the users to make a free call at some time. Thus, I used it a lot to call my parents and friends in*

my hometown. However, after the improvement of 2G signal, the network did not allow that anymore. So, I had to buy the phone card to make a call, as usual.

This account enables me to show that my research participants, especially Champ, started to see mobile phones in 2G technology as essential communicative devices to connect with others in the urban settings in their everyday lives. They found that mobile phones could go beyond the communicative function in terms of social coordination and intimacy. Later, they used mobile phones as their assistants in courtship, as to be discussed in chapters 6 and 8. My material shows that Thai teenagers have redefined the meaning of mobile phones to be intimate devices in terms of maintaining social contact within their peer groups and families. This is relevant to Ling's (2004:27) contribution. He states that "Teens' adoption of the mobile phone involves not just the simple purchase of an object, but the touchy interaction between parents and teens in the emancipation process." This will be elaborated in the following section.

4.2). 2G: non-voice services and intimacy through phones

As various scholars have discussed, intimacy is linked to touching, privacy, affective innerness and/or sexuality (see Fortunati 2002; Ling 2004). Fortunati (2002:49) further maintains that intimacy has been used as a synonym for privacy; in this context, the mobile phone becomes an instrument of intimacy by providing anonymity and distance from others. In this regard, my observation shows that the schoolgirls have much more "intimate" interactions through SMS than schoolboys. The following comments from two schoolgirls maintain this: *I always text SMS to friends when I find interesting snippets from magazines that match their personalities or characteristics* (Aoy, girl 14 years old). Weaw, a schoolgirl in the junior high school, expresses her view as follows: *in my gang, we always send text messages to each other, for example 'call me when you get home' and 'Miss U'. Sometimes I send funny messages, like 'there are two buffalos: one is ploughing, and the other is reading this message'. Text messages bond our friendships* (Weaw, girl 14 years old).

However, there are gender distinctions in interactions with SMS in different situations. Golf, a schoolboy in my research participants' group, expresses this view:

sometimes, 'words' cannot express feelings as well as a text. I get a text from my girlfriend to say 'goodnite' or 'miss you' before I go to bed, it's good. It's better than saying 'miss you' on the phone. Saying like that is not profound. I like to read SMS but I am too lazy to send them (Golf, boy 17 years old, a senior high school)

Seen in this light, SMS, one of the non-voice services, has become the preferred choices of Thai teenagers in expressing intimacy through mobile phones. To elucidate, Thai teenagers use mobile phones to increase new forms of interaction, which display a range of characteristics that differentiate them from face-to-face interaction to mediated interaction. [8] Partly, an SMS is used to maintain relationships amongst friends in case of self-representation (Harkin 2003) and to create "complex relations between local involvements and interaction across distances (connections of presence and absence)" (Srebreny-Mohammadi 1996:178). This allows me to demonstrate how the use of SMS is well incorporated into teens' peer groups. *Golf,* one of my research participants, illustrates this: *I think SMS can express my worries or my concerns to my friends. For example, yesterday, one friend of mine went home in another province. I could not go to see him off at the bus station. I sent a text message to tell him to take care and wish him a good journey. In this sense, I used SMS to be my representative to express my feelings. It can work if you can't be there yourself* (Golf, 20 years old, male university student).

Furthermore, Thai teenagers who are normally shy or less expressive use SMS to engage in social interaction with their families (Harkin ibid). One schoolgirl from my focus group participants illustrates this: *one day, I got a text message from my brother, who is not a talkative person. He sent this text to bless me on my birthday. It was very touching* (Kate, 18 years old). This account allows me to demonstrate that Thai teenagers use SMS as a means of overcoming shyness or modesty. Moreover, Texting is often used for apologies, to excuse lateness or to communicate other things that may make people uncomfortable. For example, when my research participants wanted to call off their appointments with me, they often sent me text messages to cancel rather than calling me directly on my mobile phone. This finding is related to the study of text messaging in South Cambridgeshire Teenagers, UK. The participants used texting to avoid long and sometimes awkward phone conversations (Eldridge and Grinter 2000). Similarly, Finnish teens use SMS to express the entire spectrum of

human emotions i.e. hate, love and gossip, as well as to mediate and express longing when the writer lacks the courage to call or in situations where other communication channels are inappropriate (Kasesniemi and Rautiainen 2002:171). In this sense, SMS is regarded as a means of emotional expression with various uses in different interpersonal situations (Ling 2004).

In Thai context, Thai girls are particularly likely to use SMS to express their feelings instead of talking about romantic issues with their special friends face-to-face. As one of my research participants explains, *I like to send text messages to my special friend in order to say how much I care about him or how much I like him. To some extent, it can replace words that I don't dare to speak* (Nid, girl 17 years old, senior high school). In this sense, Thai girls found SMS to be a new way to express themselves in the modern culture, in contrast to Thai traditional custom that Thai girls or women should not explicitly express their feelings to the opposite sex like this (see the section on the Gig culture in chapter 6 for more details on this issue).

To take another example, one of my research participants showed me a text message that has been sent to her by a prospective boyfriend. The message said, *if you get this message, please (1) send SMS back if u care; (2) send pic back if u r good friend; (3) send a missed call if u miss me; (4) call if u love me (ie..ie...).* This allows me to show that SMS is used as a communicative device for intimate relationships amongst close friends and romantic relationships between boy/girlfriends. Moreover, lovers reveal commitment and trust within a relationship by allowing their partners to read their messages (Harkin 2003). This is supported by my research participants' accounts. *Nan*, a 21-year-old female university student, told me *I felt odd if he did not allow me to read texts in the inbox. So I don't think it is fair if he can read my texts.* However, this view is contrary to another girl's opinion. Keng, a 20-year-old female university student, adds, *I think his SMSes are private and we are just in a girlfriend and boyfriend relationship. We have to respect each other. I don't bother to be curious about reading his texts.*

In this regard, my observations show that text messages are often shared among close friends of the same sex and boy/girlfriends as a proof of confidence that is relevant to Norwegian teen (Skog 2002). One of my research participants illustrates this: *to me,*

my texts are not secret from my close friends. We share most of the texts that we have, particularly funny ones. As for intimate texts, a few close friends are allowed to read mine (Puy, 14 years old girl). In comparison to the boys' group, girls are more likely to share their text messages with their friends than boys. At the same time, however, these messages are not shown to family members for a number of reasons, as confirmed by one of my research participants. *My text messages are a private thing for me. I'm angry when I know somebody, especially my mum or my brother, has opened them behind my back* (Vee, 17 year old boy).

Focusing upon this point, it elaborates the relationship between Thai social norms and the impact of modernisation in Thai society in terms of using new technology as a representation of individuality. For instance, Thai teenagers employ their mobile phones to express a sense of coolness and modernity: in terms of not only the colours and models of mobile phones, but also the types of ring tones and the language used in SMS messages.

SMS Service: Symbolic cues

In terms of using the SMS service, Thai teenagers have to narrow the range of symbolic cues (i.e. gestures, smiles and facial expressions) by using the symbolic expressions that are available in the SMS text function to express their feelings with a variety of smileys showing sad, glad, disappointed, and excited faces in order to reduce ambiguity (Lasen 2002). SMS has become a popular mode of expression in modern culture amongst Thai teenagers. It contains stories of love, gossip, leisure activity and apology (Kasesniemi and Rautiainen 2002)[9]. Meanwhile, it provides a sense of users' cool and modern person. The way to use the graphic expression through SMS can be illuminated by Aoy, one of my research participants, who notes, *I put the graphic of a heart or smiley face at the end of the words 'I miss you' to my boyfriend. It represents my feelings in a cool way and makes the text more lively* (Aoy, 14 years old). This is relevant to Mo, one of my research participant's comments who puts that *I like to write SMS texts in abbreviations that are popular in the teen culture. If you cannot write in this way, you will appear out-of-date or not cool to the receiver* (Mo, 17 years old).

Nowadays, Thai teenagers can type in Thai on their mobile phone handsets. This has become another selling point used by the mobile phone providers to draw the attention of Thai teenage consumers. As one of my research participants says, *when sending English text messages, I could not express my feelings as well as I could use Thai messages because we are Thai. We are familiar with the Thai language* (Nat, 17 years old).

Furthermore, the use of SMS can represent the cool sense of Thai teenagers in terms of how many texts they receive and store each day. However, this aspect has declined recently because they are more likely to make phone calls rather than texts. One of my research participants in the schoolboy group expressed this view: *I prefer to make phone calls rather than sending text messages. This is because making a phone call includes conversations and various emotions, for example laughing and crying. For me, talking on the mobile phone offers more sense of interactive communication between my friends and I, rather than text messages. Also, if I want to text, I have to type text messages in English, which is slow for me* (Bird, 17 years old).

From the above account, another reason provided here is connected with the intentions of various mobile phone operators, who have launched cheap promotion packages so that Thai teenagers can compare the various campaigns and choose their favourites. My survey research supported this point, revealing that Thai teenagers are likely to make phone calls, at 62.7 percent. Meanwhile, the likelihood of sending text messages is only 4.5 percent. The reasons why my research participants are likely to make calls rather than sending texts are explained by Vee, one of my research participants who notes: *I think texting takes a lot of time. I am a slow typist; thus, I don't like it. I like to call because I can talk with my friends straight away. Besides, I have a promotion with a cheap calling rate from Thai Mobile.*

This issue is also supported by Keaw, one of my research participants, who puts that *in the past, SMS was cheaper than calling. It cost 3 Baht per message; on the other hand, mobile phone calls cost me 5 baht per minute. But now we have many promotion packages. For example, DTAC counts the air-time rate of calling in minutes, which is now much cheaper than texting.* This response reflects such an obsession that Thai teenagers are as obsessed by affordability and price as they are by

"coolness". It further shows that the young who take advantages from the lower call charge can freely contact others. This interaction becomes part of coolness among friends in terms of having a power of communication and independence (Eldridge and Grinter 2000).

Although nowadays Thai teenagers are likely to make calls rather than using SMS, SMS is still used in their daily lives for particular purposes. For example, I got a Valentine's message from Mo. He sent me a text message on 13th February at midnight to bless me with happiness. I was quite surprised, because we had only known each other since November 2003. This message illustrates our friendship, as he perceives me as one of his close friends. This example can demonstrate that Thai people and especially Thai teenagers generally like to bless other people with good words and show a willingness to express their good wishes to their respectful people, even on the Valentine's Day. His message says, **Message in a bottle, sending my greeting 2U 2Hv a Very HAPPY VALENTINE DAY Wish UR very happy on this day 'n' forever. From Mo**

In this regard, most of my research participants sent SMS messages to bless and greet their friends instead of greeting cards, especially on special occasions. According to my survey research, 50 percent of Thai teenagers like to send SMS to friends on such special occasions as New Year, Valentine's Day and birthdays. This is contrary to the old communicative methods in Thai society. Traditionally, when Thai people want to confer blessings, they are likely to present them face-to-face, especially in interactions between seniors and juniors, in order to show respect and sincerity. What is more, Thai people like to give gifts and greeting cards to their elders and to close relatives on special occasions; they also go to the temple to receive holy water from monks. However, this communicative pattern has changed in relation to technological and social changes in terms of living far away and working long hours. To some extent, these traditional forms of blessing are getting replaced by SMS technology, which they find more private and intimate. This matches a fascinating literature from the Philippines. In Philippines, texting has quickly become central to many activities, ranging from flirting and forming relationships (Pertierra et al. 2002).

In this regard, Thai teenagers prefer to use SMS as a form of modern technology, as it is convenient and offers them a way to portray themselves as being cool while blessing people, particularly other teenagers. To support this, one of my research participants gives her opinion on the purpose of SMS in this light: *I always send SMS texts to my friends on special occasions, for example, on their birthdays, New Year's Day and the Valentine's Day. It's much cheaper than buying greeting cards. Within the function of my mobile phone handset, I can forward the same text to others. It saves a lot of my time. Besides, the memory space of my mobile phone can receive about 40 texts; thus, I can keep some special texts to read repeatedly later* (Aoy, 14-year-old girl, a junior high school).

Apart from the popular use of SMS in the 2G, a new and competing phenomenon of mobile communication emerged in Thai society – wireless fixed-line telephones, known as Personal Communication Telephones (PCT), which were launched to Thai consumers under the concept of a portable home telephone with the same number. Bangkok, a centre of modern communication systems, was the first place where this innovation was introduced. Since the inception of PCT in 1999, Thai people have become familiar with the abbreviation 'PCT', which has become a local term. In this context, my research shows that Thai people, particularly Thai teenagers, have incorporated the concept of mobile communication into their urban settings as a new communicative option, but not necessarily in the form of mobile phone as the first option.

PCT: a trial of mobile communication

As I mentioned earlier, PCT was seen as an alternative form of mobile communication for Thai teenagers when the price of mobile phone handsets was still high. PCT has become a new communicative option amongst Thai people, in particular the teenagers, who want to try the new experience of communication on the move; however, PCT is regarded as less cooler than mobile phone because it does not provide SMS or MMS or digital pictures modes, which mobile phones do. Therefore, PCT is just used as a trial of mobile communication: a technology that parents allow younger children to use before buying mobile phones for them. Parents test their children with PCT to see whether they can look after their handsets and how much

they use them per month. Most of my research participants used pagers and PCT before using mobile phones in order to prove their maturity to their parents. This is implicated in the Thai social norms in relation to social changes, as a result of which, parents need to contact their children much more than before in order to stay close to them. This helps to prevent risk and danger. They want to assess which types of communication technology are most suitable for their families. This can be illustrated by using an example of Vee's family.

Vee's father, a 52-year-old owner of a construction business, uses a GSM mobile phone on the AIS network. Vee's Mother, a 48-year-old housewife, uses a WorldPhone1800 on the DTC network. His elder sister, 19 years old, used PCT when she was a freshman student. However, her PCT could not receive signals in the Chula Longkorn University dormitory, so her father bought her a new mobile phone using 1-2-call, AIS's prepaid service, in order to keep in touch with her. Vee's younger sister, who is 11 years old, uses Vee's old PCT, which previously belonged to her elder sister. Her father additionally gives his opinion that he does not consider it necessary for her to use a mobile phone because she is not mature enough. Her activity at school is not greatly engaged with the mobile phone. When school is over, she normally walks home and stays there until dinnertime, when most of the family members gather. She is a child and does not yet have many outside activities. Thus, the PCT is a suitable communicative device for her in terms of being a trial of mobile communication before she graduates and uses a mobile phone. Another reason given by her father is that the PCT service provides the same calling rate as the landline rate but can be used on the move like a mobile phone. She is usually called just to monitor how far she is from home.

To elaborate, PCT is seen as the first step for Thai teenagers before the widespread shift to mobile phone use. My research shows that the views of Hawkins et al. (1994) can be applied here to consider why mobile phones are widely adopted by Thai teenagers despite the fact that the PCT is perceived as cheaper. Thai teenagers' decisions to transfer from pagers and PCT to mobile phones in this 2G generation can be understood in terms of technological developments in mobile phones, family influence and opinion leaders, as well as marketing motivations and consumer behaviour. As Hawkins et al. (1994) suggest, the opinions of others in a social group

can be an important spur to experimenting with new or innovative products. In addition, the innovators and the opinion leaders provide an initial opportunity for others to experience a particular innovation and to at least observe the way in which the innovation operates and its potential benefits. Put differently, the social interaction associated with adoption, and the person-to-person social dynamics, play an important role in the adoption process (Roger 1995; Rich Ling and Telenor R&D 2001). This can be elaborated in relation to the problem of PCT use when compared to the mobile phone. Nat, one of my research participants, demonstrated this.

> PCT did not have good signal reception. Sometimes, I had to shake it when I had an incoming call. Sometime when I was talking on the move or facing the wind, the PCT signal would disappear. It was not cool, shaking and talking with a PCT. (Nat, 17 years old)

This issue is similar with Pig, one of my research participants in the male university student group who noted, *before I used a mobile phone, I had used PCT for several months. My problems with PCT are that sometimes there was a signal, but at other times, there was not. I could not use PCT in the bus. There was absolutely no signal. In the same way, PCT could not be used inside the house. Therefore, my family cancelled the PCT service and then used the mobile phone only.*

In this context, the PCT has become the second choice of Thai teenagers who would like to use both technologies in terms of the cheap calling rate of PCT and the coverage and clear signal of the mobile phone. Therefore, some Thai teenagers carry both a mobile phone and a PCT at the same time. As one of my research participants explains, *I use PCT instead of the mobile phone when I want to make calls, while the mobile phone is to receive a call. When I travel, I only use the mobile phone because mobile phones can receive a clear signal even in the country and by the sea* (Keaw, 16 years old).

However, at the present time, PCT can be seen as a form of mobile communication for younger children, who just use it to contact their parents to pick them up from school, or housewives who spend their entire lives at home. For Thai teenagers, PCT is not as cool as mobile phones. As Vee's youngest sister puts it, *"I want to use a*

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mobile phone because some of my classmates use them now. I wish my brother could get a new mobile phone, so I could use his old mobile phone. PCT is okay but it is not a mobile phone!" (Nam Wan, a 10-year-old primary school student).

Showing responsibility for mobile phones

My observation shows that to some extent, mobile phone use amongst Thai teenagers provides a sense of adult responsibility. It can be elaborated that young people who use mobile phones see themselves as grown-up when they use their phones in public. Furthermore, the mobile phone has become a necessary communicative device for their everyday lives. Meanwhile, they see mobile phones as a luxury for younger children because it is beyond younger children's necessity in case of their activities outside home. As my survey illustrates, most Thai teenagers agree or strongly agree with the sentence *"I think a mobile phone is a luxury thing for children"* at 38 percent and 25.5 percent, respectively. Noticeably, the age of respondents who give this opinion ranges from 8 years old to 13 years old at nearly 23 percent. I would regard them as younger children, but they perceive themselves as sufficiently grown-up and mature to use mobile phones. They can be classed as children or 'Tweens'. This allows me to further consider how Thai teenagers have incorporated mobile phones to express their self-identities in relation to music and clothing styles, which will be examined in chapter 6.

To develop respect in the family, most of my research participants have to prove their responsibility to their parents by keeping/maintaining their own communicative devices over a long term. Furthermore, they are responsible for paying their mobile phone bills. This means that Thai teenagers are forced to economize in their use of mobile phones (Ling 2004). A related issue is the moral economy in households in terms of whether Thai teenagers are able to manage and control their budgets. This becomes the test given by parents, which brings out the tension regarding financial issues between parents and teenagers in relation to upgrading mobile phones.

According to my survey, one of the reasons why Thai teenagers need new mobile phone handsets is the loss of handsets, at 28 percent. That is, if Thai teenagers can keep their handsets safe for longer, the opportunity to acquire new models will be

increased because their parents will trust them and give them more expensive ones. This is related to earlier point that I made in chapter 2 in terms of the class distinction between the new rich middle class and the middle class, showing that the mobile phone serves as a symbol of prestige, social status and self-expressive needs (Bourdieu 1984; Skog 2002). On the other hand, if Thai teenagers do not take responsibility for their current mobile phone handsets, in terms of losing them, dropping them or having them stolen, they are less likely to be allowed new ones. Also, arguments will arise between parents and children at home. My research participants' accounts illustrate this.

Tay, a 17-year-old girl, is another close friend of *Mo*, *Vee* and *Golf* at Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School. I notice that *Tay* always borrows mobile phones from Vee or Mo to make calls at school. *Tay* tells me that she used to use a mobile phone in the past, but is currently using a PCT and is not satisfied with it. *Tay* tells me that she had used the mobile phone until one day her bill was in excess of the promotion by about five thousand Baht (70 pounds per month). She and her father quarrelled about the billing. In his anger, her father threw her mobile phone at the wall and damaged it badly beyond repair. As *Tay* recalls, *I cried a lot. My father and I didn't speak to each other for a month. He gave me a PCT to use instead of the mobile phone. But, the feeling of using the PCT and the mobile phone is totally different. I have had to use the PCT ever since. Even though a year has passed, my father still refuses to buy me a new mobile phone (Tay, a-17-year-old girl).*

The above account allows me to relate responsibility to excessive mobile phone use among Thai teenagers. In effect, they use PCT as substitute communicative devices when they are unable to use mobile phones, like *Tay*. Another reason for changing mobile phones with regard to proving their responsibility is that Thai teenagers want to upgrade to more advanced mobile phone technology. It can be elaborated that if they can operate the basic technology of mobile phones and demonstrate their knowledge of mobile phone literacy to their parents, their parents will be more likely to trust them and award them with advanced technology. On the one hand, young people will be proud of using hi-tech mobile phones in front of others to show their coolness. As I mentioned earlier in chapter 2, Tabb's Sony Ericsson P 800 signifies his success in life, being associated with successful businessmen. This is because it

can be used like a palmtop computer with an Internet connection, which indicates Tabb's self actualisation to his friends.

However, another reason for changing mobile phones is that phones are passed on to family members, usually parents or siblings. In this sense, old mobile phones are given to other family members when they are discarded – a sort of technological heritage, in order to prolong their use and to save money. This is related to the economical values that most parents try to cultivate in their children, but is hard to practice. For example, sons and daughters use their parents' old mobile phones. Elder sisters or brothers transfer their out-of-fashion mobile phones to younger sisters or brothers in order to buy trendier ones. Conversely, mothers and fathers who lack technological knowledge have to use the old mobile phones of their daughters and sons who want to replace their old ones with cool new handsets. As my survey indicates, more than 50 percent of Thai teenagers change mobile phones by buying new ones and giving their old ones to family members. This allows me to consider the moral economy in the household. Thus, the following section will illustrate how novel and fashionable mobile phones have become a significant factor for Thai teenagers as trendy and tech-savvy consumers in expressing a cool and modern identity.

Becoming trendy and tech-savvy consumers

As a result of the high demands of communication among Thai people, alongside advances in mobile phone technology, the digital mobile phone has been introduced since 1996. In 1997, there was a leap in the evolution of mobile phone technology and the inception of other mobile phone network systems[10] in Thai society. The major advance was that analogue mobile phones were superseded by the digital system known as the 2G generation. 2G mobile phone technology increased a number of functions of mobile phones. People were satisfied with the advance of technology, which enabled them to display their mobile phones and their representations through changes in the design and mode of mobile phone technology, such as caller ID, monophonic calling, organisers, alarm clocks, games and SMS functions[11].

Apart from various functions of mobile phones, my research has revealed that Thai teenagers can use their SIM[12] cards in any mobile phone handset, swapping to other

mobile phone systems. This indicates that the significant trend of marketing[13] has shifted from a product-oriented to a consumer-oriented approach. This allows me to explore the freedom of communication amongst Thai teenagers in terms of their choices and uses alongside their lifestyles. As one of my research participants tells me, *it is good when we can keep old working handsets but change the mobile phone provider service* (Neng, 21 years old boy).

However, this is in contrast to the views of other research participants, who often change phones but use the same contact number. As Mo, a 17-year-old schoolboy, adds, *I have had many mobile phone handsets so far but I keep the same number to contact friends. If I want to change the mobile phone provider, now any mobile phone providers will send my new mobile phone number to my contacts that I have saved in my phonebook. It is very convenient* (Mo, 17 years old boy). Another participant states, *I won't get bored if I can use different handsets without changing my mobile phone number* (Nan, 19 years old girl).

Since the removal of all mobile phone locks, mobile phone handsets have been available more widely for Thai consumers, especially Thai teenagers. In particular, the pre-paid service provided by mobile phone system operators, a new optional service that prevents excessive calls, has dramatically obtained a number of mobile phone users in both urban and rural areas. In this regard, the number of mobile phone users in Thailand has been rising, with 21.6 million users in 2003 (The Prachachat Thurakij newspaper, January 1, 2004 p.23).

Thai teenagers' use of mobile phones goes beyond functions to the fashion of mobile phone technologies, which can be regarded as reflecting the presence or absence of taste (Featherstone 2000). Thai teenagers create and negotiate their identities in relation to these fashionable mobile phones to become trendy and tech–savvy consumers, associated with symbolic images. My material shows that Thai teenagers are aware of the current fashions and that they are active in the creation and maintenance of their own identities, which are related to their favourite lifestyles, i.e. music and clothes (Ling 2004 and Fortunati 2003).

To become trendy and tech-savvy consumers, for example, the calling melody as one of the popular non-voice services has become a modern icon that Thai teenagers have adopted widely in terms of coolness and modernity. Thai teenagers prefer to use the calling melody service in order to change the waiting incoming call signal to the music. Therefore, people who make calls can listen to various hit songs while they are waiting for the receiver to pick up the phone. This allows me to consider the relationships between representations of technology and identity in terms of intimate relationship through SMS technology and MMS technology[14]. To discuss, a calling melody as cultural practice involves symbolic representations, which have become part of Thai teenagers' creativity in displaying themselves (Willis 1990). As one of my research participants puts it, *I always change the calling melody in relation to which song is a hit at that moment. Somehow, the song that I choose is relevant to my emotion and my personality* (Mo, 17 years old).

Despite the fact that the calling melody service, as a non-voice service, is more expensive than the basic services in terms of text messages and calling rates, Thai teenagers who want to present themselves as being cool are willing to pay for this service. *Golf,* one of my research participants, further explains this:

> I spend almost two-thirds of my billing every month on downloading music and transmitting pictures. In terms of the calling melody service, I like to use it to change my calling melody to my favourite songs. Some of my friends like to call me to listen to these songs. This prevents them from being bored while they wait for me to pick up their calls (Golf, 17 years old).

In this context, it can be elaborated that the mobile phone operators have exploited these advanced technologies to increase the price of mobile phone handsets and non-voice services. To illustrate this, the next sections which discuss 2.5G and 3G technologies can shed light on the view that Thai teenagers display the 'newness' of technological modes in terms of GPRS and digital camera phones to demonstrate the relationship between choices and communicative patterns. This allows me to provide an account of Thai teenagers' active interactivity with mobile phone technology in relation to their choices in terms of technological changes.

4.3) 2.5G: GPRS and Bluetooth wireless technology 'new ways of intimacy'

In this section, I have shifted my attention to the forms of interaction that Thai teenagers engage in as they display coolness and modernity through the new 2.5G technology of GPRS and Bluetooth wireless to achieve new types of intimacy. According to my survey research, fifty-five percent of Thai teenagers have GPRS applications within their mobile phones. Meanwhile, forty percent and thirty-two percent of Thai teenagers have the wireless application protocol (WAP) and Bluetooth wireless respectively within their mobile phones. This indicates that Thai teenagers love to use these exciting technologies as interactive methods of communication to connect with their friends and seek pleasure through their mobile phones. My observations suggest that Thai teenagers have incorporated 2.5G mobile phone technology into their everyday lives by engaging it with different purposes in relation to their lifestyles. Mo's account provides an example of this: *Yesterday, I stayed at home all day to play with my Nokia Engage. I listened to the radio on my mobile phone. It has GPRS and Bluetooth functions so I can see who is using mobile phones in the nearby area. It works just like opening MSN in that it is possible to chat with others if you want* (Mo, 17 years old).

Similar to *Mo* using the Nokia Engage as his favourite toy, *Golf* also provided an account of his use of his Nokia Engage, an example of integrated technology, to fulfil his desire. *The Nokia Engage has fulfilled my needs because it has many games, MP3 function and a stereo. Although it is expensive for my age, I think it is worthwhile. Otherwise, I would have had to buy a Sony Walkman, an MP3 player and a Game station separately.* (Golf, 17 years old). This is related to an account provided by Tabb, a 14-year-old schoolboy, which shows how interactive technology can help his parents' business: *I help my parents to take customers' orders at the weekend; I could send e-mails from my mobile phone all the time or download previews of movies from the Internet. The GPRS function is very convenient.*

Searching with GPRS mode [15]

Thai teenagers got to know the GPRS technology in 2003. Thai teenagers encompassed GPRS as being the "new, improved" way of passing data over a mobile

phone network, which transmits data more quickly and allows them to search for locations. This was because GPRS functions like a map or a set of directions, which enables new types of location-specific services.[16] For example, Thai teenagers can check bus routes and map out the positions of locations via the GPRS mode. GPRS has become one of the most popular functions of the mobile phone, apart from the digital camera and the colour screen monitor in 2.5G.

To elaborate, Thai teenagers have played with their GPRS functions in order to search for the locations of shops and other users, as well as music, ring tone and other data downloadable without time limits. To illustrate, the GPRS function, one of the TV commercials of Hutch shows the story of a girl using the GPRS function to detect that her boyfriend is lying when he says he is approaching their meeting point when he is actually somewhere else with another girl. The GPRS function can show the position of users in a virtual private network. In this sense, mobile phones will not only be able to tell us *who* we are but also *where* we are (Harkin 2003). To support this point, the popular greeting words of Thai teenagers talking on mobile phones are *where are you*? (*Yu Nai*) rather than *how are you*? (*Sabai Dee Mai*). I will provide a description of one encounter to illustrate this point.

One day, I went shopping at Puntip Plaza, the popular place to buy IT products in Bangkok, with Mo and Vee. Mo wanted to buy an MMC (Multi Media) card for his Nokia Engage in order to give his mobile phone more space for downloading games and storing data. However, he could not find the shop. Thus, he used the GPRS function to locate it. A map appeared, and the shop was shown as a small icon on his mobile phone. When Vee saw it, he said to Mo, "you are cool and you look like James Bond 007". Mo seemed proud that he could use this function of his mobile phone. Suddenly, he got an incoming call from another friend; the first thing that was said was *Yu Nai*? (Where are you?)

Trustworthiness with Image and sound

In this regard, social interaction with words or voices on mobile phones has not been enough to demonstrate trustworthiness amongst Thai teenagers in the "modern society". Pictures and real time video are thus utilised to support and confirm the trust

of Thai teenagers. As I observe, my research participant shows a video clip to her friends, which has been sent through video phone by her boyfriend, who is travelling in another province, in order to confirm his actions, location and trustworthiness. This is related to Mim's account, as she adds, *Sending special pictures can represent myself to friends and show where I am now. Then, they can see my surroundings, including sounds, which are more exciting than SMS, which is not as lively* (Mim, 21 years old). Another comment supports the same point: *I asked my boyfriend to send me some pictures of where he is. I don't want him to lie to me* (Kookai, 17 years old girl).

To some extent, Thai teenagers are likely to use GPRS mobile phone technology to increase their interpersonal roles and social communications (Louis Leung and Ran Wei 2000). *Bert*, one of my research focus group participants, gives his views on this: *I think the video clip is the most interactive at the moment. When I see something happening, I can shoot it from my mobile phone immediately as if I were a reporter. It can become the evidence later* (Bert, 22 years old).

In this context, 2.5 G mobile phone technology entails new forms of expression of Thai teenagers' subjectivity in terms of a new form of social interaction via new modes of technology such as picture phones and video phones, as well as a new freedom of action and new relationships between individuals and the collective. That is Thai teenagers use these functions to present their identities alongside and as part of their social interactions with their mobile phones. My fieldwork experience supports this point in that some of my research participants used their hi-tech mobile phones in order to fulfil their communicative experiences and bring some sense of self-actualisation. Additionally, these cool functions of 2.5G technology provide the power of social status above that of others amongst their peer groups. I will provide in the following account to illustrate this.

In November 2003, I first met Vee, Mo and Golf at Bangkapi Sukum Navapun School. They were 17 years old and were studying at senior high school, and they were very close friends. Golf was an interesting example to illustrate social interaction with his peer group vis-à-vis the mobile phone. Golf was quite good looking, kind and polite. Moreover, he is a guitarist in the school band. As a result, he

was popular amongst the girls in the school. When I met him, he was wearing an expensive wristwatch and holding his 'Nokia Engage' in hand. During our conservations, his friends borrowed his mobile phone to play a game nearby.

The 'Nokia Engage' was a new and trendy model at that time, with a stereo MP3 player, game station and GPRS technology. He always changed his mobile phone according to fashion. By using a trendy mobile, Golf had become popular at school. Ajarn Jee[17], my key informant, told me in front of Golf that, *"His father is a Mercedez Benz dealer. So, he is rich and he can change mobile phones every year."* Golf's face turned red because of the word of 'rich'. As I noted, Golf is Sino-Thai in origin; therefore, he is perceived as the richest amongst his friends. However, this demonstrates a key social value in Thai society: the way in which people like to admire others' social status, in this sense through expensive phones, but also the value of being embarrassed about riches.

From the interview, I have found that Golf has used a total of 11 mobile phone handsets (after I completed my fieldwork, I heard that Golf subsequently used a Samsung V200, Siemens SX1 and Nokia XXX: three mobile phone handsets within 6 months). He is a trendsetter in mobile phone use at his school. *"I first used a mobile phone when I was 14 years old. I think I started to have mobile phones late but ...well... for my age at that time, it was ok. But generally, most children will get mobile phones at 8 or 9 years old in this generation. My 11-year-old brother wishes to have one as well but my mum wants him to wait until he is 12 years old and then she will give him one. "*- Golf.

This account allows me to show the relationship of the mobile phone as a global icon in youth culture and tease out the changes of social values through the high technology of the mobile phone as a tool of interactive intimacy. Some Thai teenagers use their mobile phones to take pictures of parts of their bodies, such as kissing lips and sexy eyes, which they then send to their intimates in order to express their feelings. In this regard, Thai teenagers are subject to the changing Thai cultural norms in the context of modernity, which are influenced by western values, accommodating the newness of mobile phone technology to present the related sexual issues in the new experience of virtual communication. Mim, one of my research participants

reveals her view on this issue: *these sexy pictures are just pictures, which could not be taken by anybody. My real physical body still exists* (Girl, a-20-year-old). This allows me to consider the freedom of communicative spaces and private settings which is supported by Dee, one of my focus group participants in the male university group who notes, *now, modern technology has brought about pros and cons. I used to buy second hand mobile phone handsets from the retail shop but the ex-owner had left pornography on them.* This is related to Nan, one of my research participants in the female university group who puts, *I think some people take pictures of their bodies and then send them to their intimates. Normally, I just send my lips to my boyfriend. That is very exciting.*

Bluetooth wireless

Operating through GPRS connections, Bluetooth[18] wireless is one of the mobile phone applications which Thai teenagers use to present a sense of cool and modern technology to others. This is because Bluetooth hands-free equipment allows people to talk on the move, function as a means of data transmission, and replace wired connections between devices with wireless radio connections. In 2005, various types of Bluetooth wireless were available in Thai society, such as wireless speakers, helmet adapters and Bluetooth headsets (Modern Mobile Magazine, vol.2 no.7 June 2005). These technologies have become fashion items for Thai teenagers; Golf expresses this view: *I want to buy Bluetooth wireless. It is cool when you see other people use it. With the Bluetooth technology, you can receive incoming calls without pressing the button. It is very convenient and safe. My father uses it when driving.*

The new 2.5G mobile phones are not only communicative devices but also fashionable items that the users can use to present self-identities associated with fashion and taste. This can be illustrated by one encounter from my fieldwork experience.

During a shopping trip at the MBK shopping centre with my research participants (Mo, Vee and Golf), we saw a university student who sat beside us in a Japanese restaurant using a Bluetooth wireless set, which was attached into his left ear. When he got a phone call, he just touched his phone to answer and then talked through his

earphone without raising his mobile phone. Mo gave his opinion that talking through the Bluetooth wireless made him look cool and modern rather than raising his mobile phone to talk as usual.

To illustrate, Thai teenagers use Bluetooth wireless technology to show their interaction with newness that "technologies are not fixed at the innovation stage but evolve in their implementation and use" (Wajcman 2004:37). However, after Mo gave his view that the Bluetooth function was cool, Vee argued that this guy was lazy and had wasted a lot of money on such a luxury item. The perception of laziness regarding to Vee's comment enables me to discuss that Thai teenagers use the modern technology, in this sense Bluetooth wireless, to enhance their everyday lives to be more convenient and easier, as well as increasing safety on talking when they are driving or doing other activities. Their conversations reflect the way Thai teenagers employ the extra features of non-standard phones by showing that they were well beyond their means (Horst and Miller 2006). These are seen as part of being cool among friends.

Golf countered that Bluetooth wireless had now become a fashionable item, and that people who used such innovations could attract other people's attention. In light of this argument between Mo, Golf and Vee, I shall draw upon various scholars to support the idea that "the appearance as cool in relation to use the modern technology is not just at the point of its conception, invention, development and design, but also throughout its entire life-cycle, its styling, marketing, consumption and later life" (Mackey 1995:241). As well as this, the construction of cool identities of Thai teenagers is engaged by social circumstances, not only in terms of usage but also with respect to design and technical content (see Wajcman 2004).

4.4) 3G: Internet and WAP applications – enhancing interactive intimacy through mobile phones

In this section, I will discuss the newness of 3G technology and the way in which multimedia mobile phone technology has become integrated with it, for example, digital cameras, portable walkmans, MP3 players and game stations, which are utilised to enhance interactive intimacy through mobile phones. These technologies

are known as 3G (the third generation). In 3G, Thai teenagers can enter the "mobile phone Internet" era, which enables them to have more interactive "relationships" (Harkin 2003) in terms of intimacy and virtual communication. As Burgess (2004:44) further states, "the mobile telecommunications industry anticipates that 3G technology heralds the dawn of a new era where mobile data and multimedia involve an even stronger, more interactive "relationship" with the cell phone". With this respect, my research shows that Thai teenagers have incorporated 3G technology, altering their social interactions in terms of using mobile phones as entertainment communicative devices and new hand-held multimedia. One encounter from my fieldwork experiences can illustrate this view.

At the St. John school where I interview *Tabb*'s group, I notice that these young boys own the new mobile phone technologies, particularly picture phones, video phones and Internet phones. For them, mobile phones are viewed as entertainment communicative devices, which enhance sociability amongst friends. For example, Tabb downloads movie previews from the Internet to show his friends. Furthermore, he presents the features of his mobile phone handset, such as its ability to receive hot video clips of breaking news from TV stations. Eventually, he shows off the GPRS function, which allows him to chat with his friends through his mobile phone, including the way he can access the Internet to send e-mail to his friends. As Tabb says, *I like the modern technology of my mobile phone that enables me to access the Internet, where I can get information and download data. I also use the mobile phone to enhance my relationships with my friends* (Tabb, 14–year-old).

The concept of "the mobile information society" has become increasingly evident in modern Thai society in terms of using mobile phones to fashion social connections across time and space (Giddens 1990, Thompson 1995; Gillespie 1995). For example, the 3G mobile phone as a globalised media form is used as a media channel to promote and advertise new products and services with the presentation of spectacular images and sounds to arouse consumers' desires. As one of my research participants puts it, *"The Nokia Engage club has just sent the latest MMS to my mobile phone. It informed me that there will be an Engage Club party at Siam Discovery this weekend. If I have time, I would like to join them."* – Golf, 17 years old.

This form of interaction through 3G technologies is also called "mediated quasi-interaction" besides "the mediated interaction", as noted. The mediated quasi-interaction refers to involvement with the individuals who produce the symbolic contexts and the mediated messages (e.g. teenagers' text SMS) or with the individuals represented in them (e.g. teenagers who were shot by the video clip mode and was sent by their friends). This situation is structured by the way in which "some individuals are engaged primarily in producing symbolic forms for others who are not physically present, while others are involved primarily in receiving symbolic forms produced by others to whom they cannot respond" (Thompson 1995:84-85). Today, some of my research participants can receive hot news and video clips from TV stations. In this sense, the mobile phone interaction in 3G technologies enables new forms of combinations of these different types of interaction and boots the way people have experienced in a 'virtual community' of recipients who may never meet the other members of this community. To elaborate, in 3G technologies, my research found that the mobile phone is understood as both mediated interaction and mediated quasi-interaction that enhance the ideal of communication anywhere at anytime. Additionally, it is used to cement relationships across time and space.

Cool MMS technology

As noted, MMS technology has become popular amongst Thai teenagers, as it enables them to create, send and receive text messages that also include an image, audio and/or video clip. In this sense, I show again how the mobile phone can be understood as being beyond a communicative device that is used to widen and deepen social interactions. As Kopomaa (2000) argues, people use mobile phones to gather friends more frequently and in bigger groups. In my fieldwork, I observe that Thai teenagers attempt to overcome isolation by using their mobile phones to promote and intensify their leisure lifestyles in department stores, restaurants and cinemas. One of my research participants states, *in my gang, we like to take our pictures in various settings. It's a lot of fun to pose with cool actions. Sometimes, if I go somewhere else, I like to display pictures to kill the time* (Cherry, 21 years old, female university student).

This is related to my argument that new mobile phone technologies have gone beyond the technology of connection to facilitate relationships and bring people closer together. That is, they transform and articulate the social meanings and the changing forms of interaction between people (Roy Dholakia et al. 1996; Rasmussen 2000). In other words, the mobile phone can be used to reduce loneliness and for face-to-face socializing (Burgess, 2004). As one of my research participants expresses, *I like to take pictures with my close friends, and then I download them as the wallpaper on my mobile phone. The memory of my mobile phone can store those pictures as computer files. With this technology, I can take my friends with me all the time* (Tabb, 14 years old).

With MMS technology, Thai teenagers are able to share their experiences by sending pictures as MMS messages to others who have the same function or send emails to their friends' addresses. As one of the schoolgirls adds, *sometimes, I take pictures of things surrounding me when I get bored. Pictures as media have been used to share common experiences with friends* (Nid, 17 years old). Thai teenagers can set their mobile phones to receive incoming calls with picture ID of the caller and they can send video clips via mobile phones or the Internet to show their activities immediately. MMS is seen as a cool function that allows Thai teenagers to express their representations in different social settings and therefore display these pictures to others in order to enhance their self-identities. Even though MMS only arrived in Thai society in 2003, it became an extremely popular function within a few months. This is confirmed by one of my research participants: *it is exciting to see some odd pictures from friends, or sometimes I like to create text messages that include pictures. It makes my MMS look more special for someone special* (Kaew, 17 years old schoolgirl).

Regarding the use of MMS technology, most of my research participants liked to take photos of their friends and even themselves in different social settings such as at concerts, tourist attractions or private settings. This is demonstrated by *Binn*, one of my research participants: *I like to take pictures of important events like birthday parties, concerts and places I visit. It refreshes my impressive memory when I open them again* (Binn, 14 years old). Furthermore, my survey research reveals that 40.2 percent of Thai teenagers have MMS functions on their mobile phones, while 38

percent have WAP (wireless application protocol) technology[19]. However, during my fieldwork, I observe that most of my research participants use the digital camera functions in their everyday lives rather than WAP technology, which allows mobile phone users to access the Internet. Even though WAP technology is seen as a modern function alongside the MMS technology, the cost of access is still very high (50 Baht/minute). Thai teenagers have to pay more to look and feel good with a new, fashionable mobile phone. My fieldwork experience will demonstrate this through one form of 3G technology, known as O2 XPA.

O2 XPA: my dream mobile phone

One day, waiting for a concert to start, Mo introduced Judy, his senior friend, to me and allowed me to take their pictures of playing with their mobile phones during their talks. Judy owned an O2 XPA; therefore, when they met, they started talking about the functions of the O2 XPA. Judy took an MMC card out of his O2 XPA to insert into his digital camera in order to expand the memory capacity of his digital camera. After the concert, Judy inserted his MMC card back into his O2 XPA, and then e-mailed the photos he had just taken to Mo's e-mail account. Mo could not bear to admire the functions of O2 XPA, and this shows Thai core value in terms of admiring other people' wealth ; as he said, *"I will buy this model in the near future; I really like it even though I have just bought a Nokia Engage."* This allows me to show the connection of the social emulation and the presentation of cool and modern person that has been shown by Mo's dream.

Judy's interaction with his O2 XPA gave Mo a sense of coolness. To explain, O2 XPA is one example of a PDA phone with 3G technology. It looks like a palmtop or pocket PC, and is far too expensive for some of the Teen group, especially Mo. In this light, O2 XPA is one of the mobile phones of Mo's dreams. As he said, *O2 XPA is a supreme hi-technology for people who use their mobile phones as personal computers.* With its integration of the palmtop computer and the mobile phone, O2 XPA itself has several functions, for example WAP, GPRS, MMS, SMS, Bluetooth, MP3, a digital camera, and video and sound recording modes.
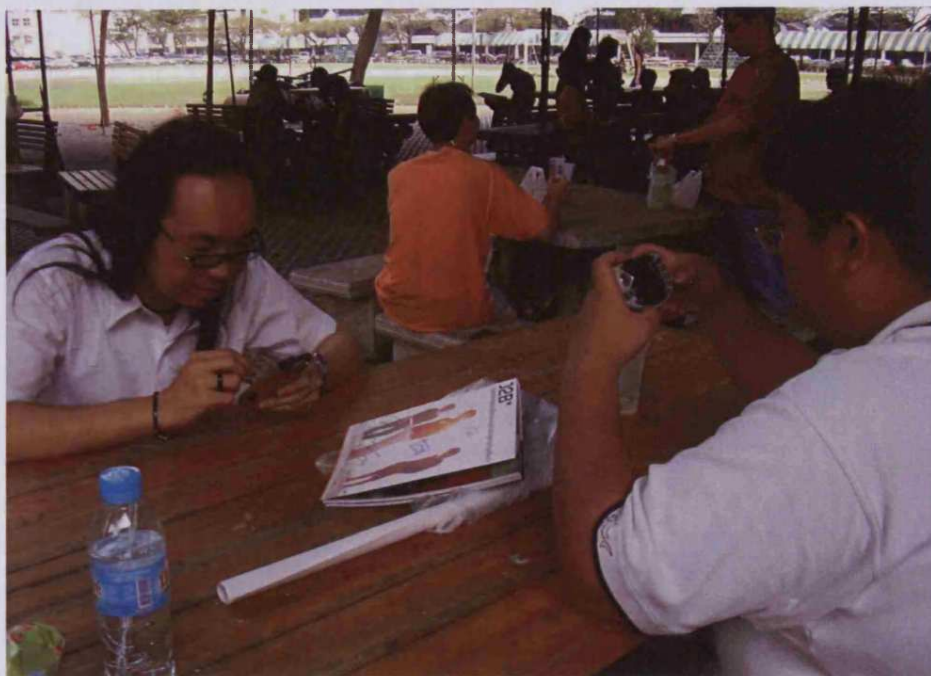
Picture: Judy (long hair) and Mo are playing with their mobile phones.

Apart from this technology, my research participants used their mobile phones to facilitate their convenient lifestyles using network services. For example, they could use e-mobile services to transfer money and pay bills, as well as searching for shop locations with GPRS technology, booking cinema tickets, sending and receiving picture and e-mails, along with getting video clips of hot news from ITV[20]and receiving M-voucher discounts. Furthermore, colour screens, data content-enabled handsets and fashion-oriented phones have been introduced to accommodate Thai teenagers who use mobile phones as a mode of expressing their personal styles and tastes. One encounter from my fieldwork experience can illustrate this.

One Sunday afternoon, I had been shopping with Mo and Vee at the *MBK* shopping mall. Suddenly, Mo got an M-voucher via SMS from the Orange operator, which gave a 20 percent discount at any branch of the *Swensens* Ice Cream parlour and the *Coffee World* restaurant. Mo tried to persuade Vee and me to use this M-voucher after lunch. *"It will be expired by the end of this month. Let's try to use it now to see if it works or not."* When we finished our ice cream, Mo showed the M-voucher on his mobile phone to the cashier. The cashier was initially surprised about this new voucher. She said she had heard of this service but Mo was the first customer to show her an M-

voucher. This M-voucher represents a mode of personal style in trendy and cool person who integrates the modern technology with their everyday lives to enhance their choices and the form of newness experience.

Conclusion

Mobile phone use demonstrates the newness of both communicative devices and entertainment devices through the progressive generations of mobile phone technology. The generation of mobile phone technology has been presented in terms of cool mobile phone models that are associated with the new experiences of Thai teenagers in their everyday lives. Thai teenagers have mediated their choices and social relationships which are actively associated with mobile phone technology alongside marketing, family and peer group influences. Thai teenagers have cultural experiences with their mobile phones in various new modes of technology. For example, video phones and digital camera phones can accommodate intimacy and social coordination among Thai teenagers. More specifically, Thai teenagers go beyond the function of connectivity to intimacy in terms of expressing emotions, privacy, affective innerness and/or sexuality to express this new freedom in communication, which is set in the context of modernisation.

Their choices of new mobile phone technology have social implications and are implicated in the conditions of their creation and use. In this sense, MMS technology, digital camera mobile phones, Internet and WAP applications are new phenomena in mobile communications that enhance the various forms of social interactions in a modern society. This brings an understanding of how mobile phone technologies are involved in the Thai context to show which aspects of the communicative patterns of Thai teenagers will remain and which will change. Based on the various meanings of mobile phones in the sense of the technology of necessity and luxury, the technology of fashion as symbol of modernity and the connotation of throwaway technology, the communicative patterns of Thai teenagers will be discussed in the next chapter to show the linkage of young people interactions and the construction of meanings.

Notes

[1] For Swingewood (1998), modern society lies in the development of culture in Marxism and sociology, which emphasise an advanced industrial capitalism. With powerful modernising force, it generates a fluid and pluralist social structure, new social class and fractions of classes, new professions, new industries and services and populations increasingly concentrated in burgeoning urban centres. In addition to the movement of modern art, therefore, the artist searches for a new language and new forms to provide expression for the 'newness' of modern society (Swingewood, 1998: 136).

[2] In contrast to the technological determinism approach, the social shaping of technology (SST) approach is employed here to look at the interactions between human agency, social relationships and marketing as they shape individuals' own choices and actions vis-à-vis the incorporation of technology. In this sense, technology is interpreted in various ways in relation to human wants and desires in various social circumstances.

[3] Without the success of 470 MHZ in this market, however, TOT had a monopoly in the mobile phone market until 1990.

[4] During 1988-1991, General Chatichai Choonhavan's government wanted to change the battlefield to a commercial field (The Krung Thep Thurakij 2002:2) in accordance with the open economy policy of other countries. For this reason, the use of mobile phones in dealing with international business played an important role amongst Thai businessmen despite the fact that the mobile phone network system was ineffective at that time and the signal reception was poor.

[5] Back in 1886, the fixed-line telephone was introduced to Thai society by the bureau of post and telegraph. However, with the limited technology, the fixed-line telephone was reserved for the royal family, the elite and military groups. In 1932, Thailand changed its political system from absolute monarchy to democracy. This led to large changes in freedom of communication and the development of public utilities throughout the country. Therefore, fixed-line telephones were first made available to the public by the Telephone Organization of Thailand (TOT) in 1954. Since that date, demand for fix-line telephones has been increasing. Similarly to the inception of the mobile phone, the fixed-line telephone at this stage marked the social status of Thai people. Difficulties in applying for fixed-line telephones in households were resolved by the introduction of mobile phones in 1986. In the past, Thai people who wanted to install fixed-line telephones in their households often spent many years on waiting lists until the telephone network was completed.

[6] See more details in chapter 5. The mobile phone was generated in terms of both the technology of luxury and necessity.

[7] In 1990 and 1991, the second and the third mobile phone providers, AIS (Advanced Info Service) and DTAC (Total Access Communication) entered the Thai telecommunication service, operating at 900 MHz and 800 MHz, respectively. As both network systems were still under construction at that stage, mobile phones could only be used in Bangkok metropolis or the surrounding big cities. This was because

these analogue networks had low traffic capacity, unreliable handover, poor voice quality, and poor security. Specifically, the analogue mobile phone used voice service only, without the data service. Thus, it could not provide the short message service (SMS) that is in use at the present time (Unnop Khuntikul 2002).

[8] In this sense, mobile phone usage in terms of SMS becomes a new form of communication so-called "mediated interaction" – in which participants who do not share the same spatial-temporal reference system sometimes cannot understand the contexts that others use (see Thompson 1995). Put in another way, "the use of a technological medium can convey the information or symbolic content to be transmitted to individuals who are remote in space, in time or both" (Thompson ibid:83).

[9] I will provide more details on mobile phone talk in chapter 7.

[10] GSM (Global System for Mobile Communication) was first introduced into Thailand in 1994 by AIS. Meanwhile, DTAC started to operate on the 1800 MHz frequency band under the brand of "World Phone 1800" in the following year. In 2001, Orange was also introduced, with cheap package promotions and the "Get Closer" campaign, which changed the image positioning of mobile phones in Thai society from communicative devices to family ties (Pratumporn Sirirungkamanon 1989; Sasitorn Ittanuvakin 1995 and Unnop Khuntikul 2002). Subsequently, the Thai mobile and Hutch networks entered the mobile phone market in 2002 and 2003, respectively. More specifically, Hutch has also offered cheap calling rates, 'buy one, get one free' handsets and a variety of non-voice services as key selling points.

[11] SMS stands for Short Message Service, which is available on digital GSM networks in 2G. It allows users to type messages of up to 160 characters with different languages and symbolic expressions. SMS was introduced into Thai society by AIS and DTAC around 1996.

[12] SIM stands for Subscriber Identity Module.

[13] Besides the advance of mobile phone technology, another element that spurred the new phenomenon of mobile communication in Thai society was that DTAC Company, the first mobile phone operator, unlocked its international mobile equipment identification (IMEI) code in 2001.

[14] Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) is a descendant of SMS which is a method of transmitting graphics, video clips, sound files and short text messages over wireless networks using the WAP protocol (www. webopedia.com/term/MMS.html).

[15] GPRS stands for General Packet Radio Service, known as 2.5G technology.

[16] Location-based services (LBS) function by identifying the "cell", from which operators can ascertain the rough location of phone users, and can provide relevant information to the handset, such as the whereabouts of the nearest ATM machine or railway station (see McCarthy and Miller 2003:p.18).

[17] *Ajarn* (in Thai) means "master", and is a title that Thai people put in front of the name in order to denote respect for someone who is a teacher. Thus, both of my

research participants were her students, and I called her *Ajarn Jee* (Jee is her nickname).

[18] Bluetooth is a standard developed to allow any sort of electronic device (PCs, laptops, PDAs, mobile phones) to communicate with others and make their own connections, without wires, cables or any direct action over a range of approximately ten metres (see McCarthy and Miller 2003: p.20).

[19] WAP is the first step towards international mobile Internet and third-generation (3G) technology, which combines high-speed access and Internet-protocol based services, enabling a user to view video while browsing the Internet.

[20] ITV is one of the free TV stations in Thailand, which co-operates with some mobile phone providers in providing non-voice services to customers.

Chapter 5

Generating the Meanings of Mobile Phone

This chapter considers the way Thai teenagers apply constructions of meanings through their mobile phone activities. In doing so, I will further consider the meanings of mobile phones in young people's social settings which are generated in terms of missed calls, the technology of necessity and luxury, the technology of fashion as a symbol of modernity, as well as the connotation as throwaway gadget. These meanings will come out in terms of certain nuances in generational attitudes between young people and parents. Subsequently this will show their social interactions and their appropriations vis-à-vis the mobile phone in households. In examining this, I shall divide this chapter into four sections to demonstrate various meanings of mobile phone in terms of missed calls, the technology of necessity and luxury, the technology of fashion as a symbol of modernity and the throwaway technology. Thus, the first section will highlight missed calls as 'the culture of shooting' by examining accounts on young people's reactions to missed calls in different purposes. It explores what is meant by the sense of missing, the concern and worry generated and attached to of those Thai teenagers mobile phone interactions. And then, they convey these social meanings to show their intimate relationship.

The second section considers the meanings of mobile phone as the technology of necessity and luxury. In this sense, where the perception of luxurious mobile phones associated with cool identity of Thai teenagers becomes part of items used by fulfilling their pleasures and desires in terms of marking their social status and communicating their positions in the social world (Corrigan 1997). Alternatively, the perception of necessity can be explained in such a way that parents want them to economise by restricting purchases to simply function and necessities of mobile phones in order to cultivate the economical values (Livingstone and Lunt 1992). My material shows that Thai teenagers use mobile phones more than a necessary device, but around this are interactions in terms of fashion as a symbol of modernity which also brings it out as a luxury. This combines the dynamic of social interactions vis-à-vis mobile phones and Thai teenagers to provide understandings of modernity.

Up to this point as the third section, I shall examine the meanings of the mobile phone as technology of fashion and a symbol of modernity which is inseparable from Thai teenagers' everyday lives and is used to display its owner as cool and modern in public settings. My argument shows that fashionable mobile phone is a key resource of a symbol of modernity which Thai teenagers can make expressive visual statements about their identities: Thai teenagers appear to need to be social and individual at the same time. Put differently, the fashionable mobile phone embodies a range of symbolic values which are collectively understood within and across different social groups (Benette 2005:95). In examining this, the contribution of Veblen (1994) is fit into my research by looking at how some Thai middle class teenagers adopt styles of fashionable mobile phones from Thai new rich middle class teenagers to display wealth and social status as Veblen refers to such behaviour as 'conspicuous consumption'. In terms of the literature, my research will bring out how the mobile phone can also be regarded as a means of communication and the establishment of identity, as well as maintaining social status (Barnard 1996; Chaney 1996), as presented in other chapters.

Therefore, I will then be able to show the connections between luxurious mobile phone and fashionable mobile phone as a symbol of modernity that help form cool and modern identity. They are investigated here in relation to the choices and decision-making of Thai teenagers in buying their mobile phones. My material will show how these connections come out in 'lived settings' of young people vis-à-vis mobile phones that are engaged with the moral economy in households. For instance, parents refer to the mobile phone as 'throwaway' or 'rubbish technology' which will be accumulated in the house when it is useless, but young people feel that it has intimate connections regarding their personal relationships, as explored in the last section.

5.1) Missed calls: Miss you

This section brings out the meanings of missed calls which usually appear on the screen of mobile phone as they generate different meanings in various cultural settings. To clarify, a missed call in young people's interactions is viewed as equal to "I miss you". Thai teenagers symbolized the 'missed call' as 'concern and worry', as well as, 'the line of greetings' among friends. These connotations allow me to display the fact that the mobile phone is engaged in the new and unfamiliar communication patterns of Thai

teenagers in relation to the missed call (see Jukka-Pekka Puro 2002). To elaborate, some missed calls represent a lack of money or credit on the mobile phone, while others convey some negotiated meanings such as, *"I have arrived already"* or *"Pick me up"*; therefore, people who have more credit have to call them back. As my survey research confirms, more than fifty percent of Thai teenagers who receive missed calls always call back as a matter of priority. My research participants demonstrate different views in this regard.

> *My friends always send me missed calls; the call is missed to receive when they have no money on their mobile phones. Yet, I am willing to call them back because my mobile phone has a 'free minutes' promotion and they know I will call them back* (Vee, male, 17 years old).

This is somewhat contradict to another research participant who consider missed calls as annoying calls. As Cherry, a 21-year-old, adds, *for me, missed calls are not disgusting but annoying. My friends always give me missed calls to arouse me to call them back. When I do not, they send missed calls again and again until I call them back* (Cherry, female, 21 years old).

These above opinions bring out the meanings of missed calls and the social interactions amongst friends to demonstrate that people who have more power of communication, in this sense credits on mobile phone, have to call back. On the other hand, people who have a lack of credit on mobile phone play the deviant game to force other people to call them back as they request. One of my research participants expresses on this point that: *It seems like a competition amongst friends to show who are quicker than others to pick up a missed call* (Nid, girl, 16 years old). This is related to my argument in terms of missed calls as a representation of coolness as part of modernity and new communicative pattern among Teens. Up to this point, another meaning of missed calls can be represented in some situations as they show their identity with the calling ID. As one of my research participants demonstrates this, *a missed call is used when I want to show my mobile phone number to other people. Later, they save it in their phonebooks* (Tumm, female, 21 years old).

In analysing above, I show that the meanings of missed calls are connected with my argument to demonstrate that Thai teenagers use mobile phones as their intimate communicative devices associated with symbolic meanings. To elaborate on this, not only can the interactions of missed calls be viewed as the idea of friendship, they also contain the sense of competition, which can be explained by the culture of "shooting a missed call". In this sense, the culture of "shooting a missed call" refers to calling a mobile phone number and then hanging up quickly before the mobile phone's owner can pick up the call. This action can be signified to the meaning of running out of credit on the mobile phone. Thai teenagers call this action of "shooting" as *"Ying"* in Thai term; and it has a well-known meaning in Thai teenagers' subculture because it reflects close personal relationships among friends. For example, if one person wants to give another person his/her mobile phone number, he/she will call quickly, which is seen as shooting the signal to another mobile phone. Then, the receiver will get the number of the missed call. Furthermore, most Thai teenagers feel that getting other people's mobile phone numbers with this shooting action is more convenient than jotting the number down on paper. As one of my research participants said, *"Nowadays, I have more than 120 contacts saved in my personal phonebook; it's convenient to ask for new numbers by shooting missed called into my mobile phone. My friends and I like to do so" (Vee, 17 years old)*. On the one hand, shooting missed calls has become a game played amongst friends in relation to different meanings such as loneliness, popularity and competition. One encounter from my fieldwork can illustrate the culture of shooting missed calls in this regard.

On the way to drop Mo, one of my research participants, at his house, I suddenly heard the beeping sound of Mo's mobile phone, which was set like the buzz of a cricket. It came off once and then stopped. For the next few minutes, it happened again and again. I was unsure about why he did not pick up the phone, but I did not ask him. When we stopped at the traffic light, I looked at Mo; he was looking at his mobile phone and he said, *"One of my friends is shooting (Ying) me"*. I asked him to explain, and he said, *"We are playing a game of shooting missed calls. I shoot him back as well to compete over who can pick up the missed call quicker than the other.* I asked him what these missed calls meant to him and he explained, *"It is a game for killing time when you're bored. It shows that whoever starts to play the game is bored. He wants his friend to play with*

him. That's it! In other senses, it means, 'hey...where are you? Call me back? I need to talk with you', or 'I miss you' if the shooter is a girl ".

This culture of shooting missed calls, in this sense the quick calls appearing as missed calls on the screen, has created pervasive meanings in terms of unreceived calls, game playing and popular people for Thai teenagers. Another of my research participants showed me her missed calls when we met at her school. She said, *"Pe Aor (my nick name is Aor and she called me Pe to indicate respect), today I was shot with twenty-five missed calls. This was less than my friend, who gets fifty missed calls per day ".* In this sense, the number of missed calls not only indicates the game of shooting missed calls but also signifies a sense of being a popular person that friends are likely to play with. She also commented that shooting calls can mean "I miss you". As she noted, *"missed calls are created in our group to imply the same meanings: firstly, 'my credit is low but I need to talk with you'. Secondly, when I shoot missed calls before going to bed, it means 'good night'. Thirdly, when I have an appointment with some friends who are late, I shoot a missed call to remind them that somebody is waiting for them* (Aoy, girl, 15 years old).

To elaborate, 'missed calls' reinforce widespread social norms of economic and power hierarchies, social exchange and gender roles, as well as a particular context and relationship between two people (Donner 2005). In this regard, missed calls can be best understood as Thai teenagers' subcultures in relation to their awareness of spending money vis-à-vis popularity among friends. This is demonstrated for example by the *"SIM He Ha"* campaign, a recent advert for Dprompt (the pre paid service of DTAC), launched in 2005, which may be translated into English as the *Amusing SIM card.* In this campaign, peer groups can shoot "missed calls" to friends for free within 5 seconds and get a discount rate for one Baht per minute when they call friends after school. Thus, the issues of shooting missed calls relating with this campaign conveys the meanings of intimacy to friends. Meanwhile, it can also be viewed in terms of economy-conscious people who rely on other people's means. This is relevant to my argument in view of the fact that Thai middle class who are perceived as not rich and not poor economise themselves in using mobile phone. This demonstrates the change in using mobile phone as the representation of coolness to the sense of emergency. As *Kookai,* one of my research participants, expresses, *"Sometimes, I am selfish in shooting other people missed*

calls to get them to call me back. But some other times, the missed calls are useful in an *emergency when you have no money"* (Kookai, girl, 17 years old).

Furthermore, my research not only demonstrates the meanings of missed calls but also considers how these meanings are embedded in technology, in particular the mobile phone, which has brought about imagined connections and intimate relationships, including a sense of attachment as part of Thai teenagers' everyday lives. I shall draw upon Mackay (1997)'s contribution in order to give an example of the mobile phone as the symbolic nature of a technology. This contribution connects with my argument in the sense that Thai teenagers use mobile phones to create their 'self' identities in terms of the expressive and symbolic aspects of social life (see Lee and Munro 2001). In this light, the mobile phone is concerned with the shifting meaning of technology over time and it refers to a symbolic significance that varies with locales. This means that the cultural shaping of technology is not only confined to function but can be applied to flexible social meanings. I draw on material from in-depth interviews to examine the connections that Thai teenagers make with mobile phones as symbolic resources alongside their social interactions and cultural identities. My focus groups participants, who were high school students and university students, provided information in this regard.

Neng, a -21-year-old male university confirms that the mobile phone becomes a fashion icon to him: *For me, the mobile phone is a hi-tech device and also a fashionable stuff at* *the same time. It can be a trendy and stylish icon to show my identity. If I have an* *obsolete style, I have to raise my hand to cover my mobile phone, especially in public* *places such as Siam Square. But if I have the newest one, I'm very confident about* *talking on my mobile phone in public* (Neng, male university student, 21 years old). This is similar to another research participant as he claims that mobile phone is a means of expression. *The mobile phone is a communicative device that expresses our variety of* *feelings, for example, sad, glad and down. It is also an entertainment device that I can* *use to kill time during long waits. If I didn't have a mobile phone, I would need to use a* *telephone line instead* (Bird, senior high school boy, 17 years old)

The mobile phone as a means of expression is relevant to another account showing that the interaction of mobile phone has more meanings beyond the function of connectivity. One of my research participants expressed how the mobile phone is embedded in her

everyday life: *I wouldn't be able to stand it if I don't have my mobile phone with me one day. For me, it means an expressive device. When you miss somebody, you can call them immediately. Moreover, when I have nothing to do at home such as watching TV and chatting via MSN, I can play a game on my mobile phone. When I have friends calling or making appointments, I'm very happy when I hear my ring tone* (Keaw, senior high school girl, 16 years old).

The above material brings out how the meanings of mobile phones are connected to the meanings of missed calls for young people in the context of social and cultural change within the social settings. This investigation seeks to show that young people's mobile phone consumption is the means of reflective engagements that achieves the outward expression of inward ideas, presenting not just a change in tastes and preferences, but also a symbol of status (McCracken 1990). To reiterate, the mobile phone as an electronic material culture can illustrate cultural differences between particular individuals and their means of representation by acting as a status symbol (Chaney 2002). Therefore, in the next section, I will discuss the nuances of meanings of mobile phones as a technology of necessity and luxury, which underpin the issue of how the meanings of mobile phones can satisfy the needs, desires and pleasure of Thai teenagers by being used as a medium for expression.

5.2) The technology of necessity and luxury

In this section, I will make the connection between the social interactions of missed calls and the meanings of mobile phones in terms of young people's uses and the interrelationship with self-expression by grounding the accounts on Tween and Teen in various settings. I will discuss the juxtaposition of the meanings of mobile phones, which are perceived as technology of 'necessity and luxury', as problematic amongst Thai teenagers. This argument is related to the connection between their socio-economic status (class and income) and their personal decisions concerning perceptions of necessity and luxury as dimensions of consumption in the modern culture. Focusing upon this point, my research further investigates how Thai teenagers claim that the necessity of mobile phone is used to justify expenditure or economizing in terms of choosing the simple function of mobile phone. Meanwhile, a luxurious mobile phone is used to communicate their social status which is marked materially through the display or absence of luxury

(Lunt and Livingstone 1992; Gronow 1997). In probing this, my research builds on definitions of necessity and luxury from various scholars to explain why the mobile phone can be perceived as a technology of both necessity and luxury in this regard.

The discussion of the mobile phone as the technology of necessity and luxury will be interpreted into various meanings involved with needs, desires and pleasures of Thai teenagers in various circumstances. In examining this, I shall draw upon how the term of necessity is fit into the utility of mobile phone as a communicative device that serves basic needs of Thai teenagers for keeping in touch with family and peer group and reducing their anxiety and distance in various settings in Bangkok. My research displays that most Thai teenagers use mobile phones to satisfy their basic needs through the functional features of mobile phone in terms of communication, i.e. calling and receiving incoming calls, as well as sending text messages and pictures. My survey research supports the necessity of mobile phone in the sense that Thai teenagers need to use their mobile phones for the purpose of contacting parents at eighty percent, making appointments at seventy-five percent and chatting with friends at seventy percent.

The purpose of mobile phone used
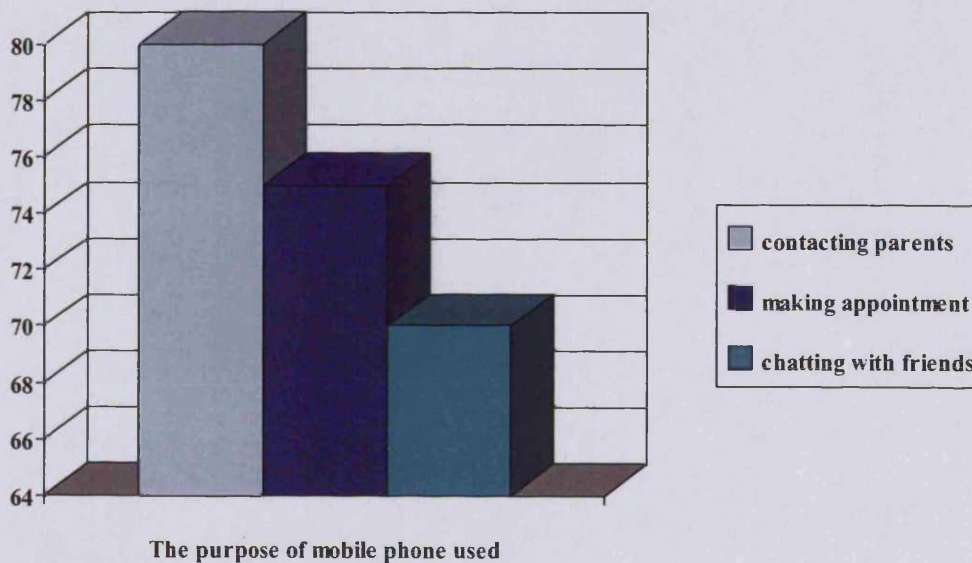
This finding is related to one account of my research participants whose father worked in another province at the Eastern part of Thailand. His account shows that the mobile phone becomes the technology of necessity in his life in this regard.

The mobile phone is a necessary communicative device for my family and
me. When we did not have mobile phones, we shared a telephone with my
auntie's house, which was next to our house. At first, they came to let us
know that we had a telephone call. Later, they told anyone who called us
that we were busy or we were out. When we faced this problem, my father,
who worked in another province, tried to call us everyday. He decided to
buy a mobile phone so we could contact him (Ton, 17-year- old boy).

To examine this account, the term 'necessity' can be defined as something necessary to maintain life, such as food, shelter and clothes, as well as, communication. In this context, the mobile phone is viewed as a communicative device and becomes necessity for *Ton*'s family in order to keep in touch with each other. Meanwhile, 'luxury' can contain contrasting meanings to necessity; it is satisfied wants or desires rather than basic needs. To elaborate, luxurious mobile phones are also recognized by their ability to mark the rank of the owners and thus communicate social position in a non-verbal way. To exemplify this point, Thai teenagers mostly use mobile phones to meet higher needs by conveying non-material meanings such as love, fear and security and also by expressing their social identity (Lunt and Livingstone 1992).

As previously noted, Thai teenagers perceive their mobile phones as close friends and means of self-expression in terms of being cool and modern. In addition, the meanings of mobile phones in relation to friendship, loving relationship and parenthood have been associated with various settings amongst Thai teenagers. This enables me to provide how luxurious mobile phones are involved with the superfluous consumption which exceed necessary function of mobile phone to distinguish their unique styles among their peer groups (Gronow 1997). One of my research participants who use mobile phone to present his style expresses on this view, *I chose the Samsung E750, a digital mobile phone with the multi-shot function. It was quite expensive when compared with the basic digital camera phones. However, it presents my style, rather than the ordinary ones that I don't want to follow anyone in my group* (Bin, boy, 14 years old).

Focusing upon this point, I would further argue that the mobile phone is perceived as the luxury item as a result of a transformation of cultural values and the birth of new rich middle class, as previously noted in chapter 2. The word 'luxury' is normally used to

convey the idea of consumption of costly and high-quality goods, food or services; it can also carry some implicit judgment that luxurious goods provide a means of social distinction. To illustrate, my research displays that Thai teenagers purchase mobile phones that have luxurious functions beyond the basic functions, not only for communicating but also for providing a certain degree of prestige, convenience and comfort. One of my research participants who uses mobile phone to serve the modern lifestyle demonstrates in this view, *I like to take pictures with my digital camera because they look cooler than pictures taken with an ordinary camera. It is because my camera is so big, not compact and not cool. It is not convenient to take both camera and mobile phone with me. On the one hand, it can be a mobile phone; on the other, it can substitute the camera. Thus, the digital mobile phone can serve my modern lifestyle immediately* (Kookai, a school girl, 14 years old).

From this account, I shall make the connections between luxurious function of mobile phone and the expression of identity that have been associated with the representation of Thai teenagers' comfort and convenience in the modern lifestyle (Lunt and Livingstone 1992). To some extent, Thai teenagers choose comforts beyond their means because of the conspicuous consumption and social emulations. My analysis of *Fha*'s account, a Tween girl at Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, can demonstrate in this regard.

> *I started to use the mobile phone when I was 12 years old. Because I saw many people in the department store holding latest mobile phones of Nokia 8250 and my friend used this model as well. This model has the luxurious option with the compact size and nice image. Thus, I asked for money from my mother to buy it. She said that I want the luxurious mobile phone beyond my age. I argued that it was my first mobile phone; thus, I should have the best one for communicating and for presenting myself.* (Fha, 14 years old)

According to this account, these meanings of mobile phones unavoidably enter the space of the consumption of necessities and luxuries in their everyday lives. This finding allows me to show why the boundaries of necessity and luxuries are collapsing. One of my research participants demonstrates that; *at my house, everyone has their own mobile phones now. To me, the mobile phone has become a necessary communicative device in my daily life to contact my family and friends. It stops me feeling lonely. On the other*

hand, the mobile phone that I use makes me look cool and modern when I use it amongst my friends (Nat, girl, 17 years old). By this, my research participants share their experiences, illustrating that mobile phones can be understood as both necessities and luxuries, serving both basic and higher needs. In this context, the accounts of my research participants demonstrate that the necessity and luxury distinction has implications for many Thai teenagers' decisions and is also what is meant by their understandings of modernity. For example, Bin and Tarr were rewarded with latest mobile phones by their parents when they made good grades in their final examination. Bin chose the multi-shot of Samsung E750 because it was expensive, luxurious and popular as advertised on TV commercials which was seen as a modern style by others. Meanwhile, Tarr selected the Kyocera brand with the karaoke function but had merely basic digital camera. This new brand was not as popular as Samsung and Nokia. However, Tarr chose it because this brand was on promotion and seemed to offer a good deal for him.

In this sense, therefore, the question of whether goods are defined as necessities or luxury items is based on a person's judgment, which is related to key cultural choices in the realms of morality, desire, tastes and pleasure. This is central to Douglas and Isherwood (1978)'s argument that goods not only show what particular social categories are relevant in a given culture, but also stabilize these categories in carrying social meanings and maintaining social relationships. I would argue that the luxurious mobile phones that Thai teenagers choose are associated with those chosen by their peer groups; families and the social influences of the better off. To elaborate this, Thai teenagers do not make decisions based on the basic functions of mobile phones; on the other hand, they socially accept what luxuries define as their achievements (Lunt and Livingstone 1992). One encounter of my fieldwork experiences can demonstrate this.

On my visits to one mobile phone retail shop at the *MBK shopping mall* to interview the shopkeeper about the consumer behaviours, I observed customers. I observed that one family (father, mother and daughter) entered the shop and asked for the information services in order to buy the mobile phone. The mother asked the salesman to show the flip flop model of Motorola with the colour screen but it could not take photos for her daughter. Meanwhile, the father wanted the mother to buy another model with simple functions i.e. no camera and no colour screen which had lower price. He argued that the daughter was still young; she should not deserve to use the hi-tech mobile phone at that

moment. However, the mother replied that she wanted her daughter to use the hi-tech mobile phone because it might help prevent her daughter from changing the mobile phone in the long term.

While father and mother were disputing whether they would choose the necessity or luxury of mobile phones, I noticed that the Tween daughter liked the model of Samsung E 750 with luxurious functions i.e. multi-shot digital camera, e-mail and Bluetooth wireless. Thus, when the mother asked whether she liked the Motorola model or not, she refused it by swinging her head instead of saying no. Finally, this family went out the shop because they could not reach their agreements. And maybe they also went out because they wanted more choices, as I saw them visiting another shop that was adjacent to this shop.

In analysing this, the distinction of luxurious mobile phone between mother and daughter in this context is viewed to have different meanings that I analysed through the ears dropping technique. As the daughter saw it, the higher technology the mobile phone has, the more luxurious she is. And this luxurious mobile phone can be associated with her achievement as being cool and modern. Meanwhile, the standpoint of luxury and necessity between the mother and the father is controversial in the sense that the father viewed the necessity of mobile phone on the basis that it is merely used to call and to receive the incoming calls as the basic technology. For the mother, the necessity is engaged with the luxury in the sense that the luxurious mobile phone can serve needs of the daughter in the long term which may save cost in frequently changing the mobile phone to follow fashion. In this respect, the definitions of necessity and luxury are contestable, and must be grounded in the relation to other societal and moral beliefs (Fraser cited in Lunt and Livingstone 1992: 150). Thus, this account shows the connection that the range of necessity and luxury is related to one's moral judgement, as well as satisfaction and pleasure. This finding is related to Mo's account showing that necessity is provided by Mo's mother to cultivate his economical value. But for luxury, Mo is encouraged to save from his monthly living allowance so as to buy the Nokia Engage, as earlier noted in chapter 2.

This engagement is relevant to Corrigan (1997)'s work in such a way that necessities may provide what we need for existence and relieve discomfort, but luxuries

are the way to pleasure rather than mere comfort (Corrigan 1997:15). In order to illustrate this, my material further brings out the dispute between necessity and luxury amongst Thai teenagers in terms of whether they purchase mobile phones to serve communicative needs or to provide pleasure. My observation with the Teen group at the *MBK shopping mall* can demonstrate these issues.

While mobile phone shopping at the *MBK shopping mall* with me, my research participants, Vee, Mo and Golf passed many mobile phone shops. Golf often stopped to look at those mobile phones inside the glass tables that were displayed all along the walkway, and I noticed that the phones were quite expensive and had many luxurious functions. That is to say, these mobile phones were seen as luxuries by teenagers like Golf. However, he could not help asking about the features of mobile phones as if he was intending to buy one there and then, such as how much space the MP3 functions had, the colour pixel capabilities in digital pictures and how many games were available to play on those mobile phones.

Golf's action was in contrast to Mo and Vee, who merely looked at the functions of mobile phones with reasonable prices because they were concerned about money that had to be asked from parents. As noted in chapter 2, Mo and Vee are not spoiled by parents even though they have means to afford the luxurious brands for their children. However, their parents want them to use the mobile phones of basic functions rather than the luxurious mobile phones to economise their conspicuous consumption. This is related to the economical values that parents have cultivated in children though it is hard to practice for them. My material shows that finally Mo bought the Nokia Engage to follow Golf in the next two months.

Back to the fieldwork, Mo gossiped that Golf had just changed his mobile phone the previous month; now he wanted to change it again. It seems that Golf's behaviour encouraged Mo and Vee's desire to change their current mobile phones as well. This was clear from Vee's behaviour, and he also complained to me that he really needed a new mobile phone because his mobile phone did not have a digital camera or an MP3 function like Golf's. I observed that Vee did not dare to talk about his mobile phone amongst his friends. This account allows me to demonstrate that Thai teenagers use luxurious mobile

phones to fulfil their desire and imagination regarding the convenience of communication that goes beyond the necessity.

As various researchers have shown, people who have had mobile phones for more than one year tend to see them as stylish, and also as a luxury and/ or a necessity (Katz, Aakhus, Hyo Dong Kim and Turner 2003:81). It is significant that in this context mobile phones are seen as a "luxurious necessity" amongst Thai teenagers, who display their mobile phones as marks of social status. As Lunt and Livingstone (1992) remark, the classifications of goods are thus related to the classifications of people. I shall build on these literatures by arguing that class distinctions can now be indicated through the types of goods consumed, in this sense the necessity and luxury of mobile phone (Corrigan 1997; McKendrick et al. 1982; McCracken 1988; Douglas and Isherwood 1979).

To explicate that commodities have social lives (see Appadurai 1986),Thai teenagers regard their mobile phones as necessities in the modern culture in terms of enabling them to get closer to their parents and their friends. Meanwhile, they perceive the mobile phone as the luxurious part of their self identities to show the prestige meanings towards others. To have a special number of mobile phone is seen as one way to show coolness and modernity and these identities are related to displaying wealth among peer group. Kwang, one of my research participants in the St. John School can demonstrate in this regard.

> *In my school, I know a boy who is famous because of his wealth. He uses the most expensive mobile phone of Nokia in spite of the fact that he is 14 years old. Many students know him from his mobile phone number, which is easily remembered. It is 09-7777779. We heard that he has bought this special number from a mobile phone shop, where he knows them personally* (Kwang, girl, 14 years old).

Focusing upon this account, Thai teenagers use stylish or luxurious mobile phones to present their status in such an exclusive way as the beautiful number, as noted. Furthermore, the use of stylish and fashionable mobile phones which are associated with Thai teenagers' identity is provided by Fha, one of my research participants who expresses, "*Schoolboys in my class always have the hi-end technology of mobile phones,*

for example sliding pop-up folders, video phones or Internet phones. It seems to me that those luxurious mobile phones make the users outstanding (Fha, girl, 14 years old).

Fha's view brings about the comparable idea with *Ton*, a 17-year-old schoolboy, who puts, *I can use the basic functions of a mobile phone but I don't feel good about it. If I had more choices, I would like to use the luxurious functions like my friends* (Ton, boy, 17 years old). This account is similar to another research participant who sees the luxurious mobile phone is significant and so basic to her. *Now, the trend for mobile phones is for colour screens and digital cameras, particularly in the latest advertised one. I want this mobile phone because it is expensive* (Kwang, girl, 14 years old).

In analysing above, my research shows that most Thai teenagers accumulate mobile phones handsets as the accumulation of wealth to differentiate them from other classes (Veblen 1994). This is relevant to Rosenlund (cited in Skog, 2002:256)'s contribution. He finds that mobile phone ownership is higher among working-class than among service-class men. Similarly, in the work of Bourdieu (1984), middle and upper class people want possessions that serve prestige, status and self-expressive needs and indicate good taste.

On the contrary, my material suggests, that the image of the mobile phone may have an impact on the class division of mobile phone ownership amongst Thai teenagers. According to my survey research, the lower class Thai teenagers who have expenses of no more than 3,000 baht per month try to use luxurious mobile phones for self-actualisation through social emulation or social competition with upper class Thai teenagers. The connection of necessity and luxury allows me to draw upon the in-depth interviews with my research participants to show how these categories are now collapsing amongst Thai teenagers. One of my research participants expresses that, *my first mobile phone was a Nokia 8250. I used it when I was 12 years old. At that time, it cost about 20,000 Baht. I nagged my mum every day about the necessity of this model, which was not luxurious. This was because my friends owned more luxurious mobile phones than I did* (Fha, girl, 14 years old). The same point is provided by another research participant who perceives that the luxurious mobile phone becomes decency for him. Golf, a-17-year-old schoolboy, adds, *I always buy mobile phones following advertisements or*

As noted, the picture of Thai teenagers using their mobile phones has become a mundane picture in everyday lives as we are getting used to them and seeing them as a necessity and luxury. My empirical data illustrate that Thai teenagers give priority to the mobile phone as the most important means of communication in their everyday lives that they cannot do without; nearly 50 percent hold this view. Furthermore, my survey research according to the colour statistical chart reveals that Thai teenagers rank the meaning of the mobile phone not only as a communicative device, at eighty percent, but also as a marker of modernity, at sixty-seven percent, as a means of maintaining relationship ties, at forty-nine percent, as a fashion statement, at forty-seven percent, and as a close friend at thirty percent.
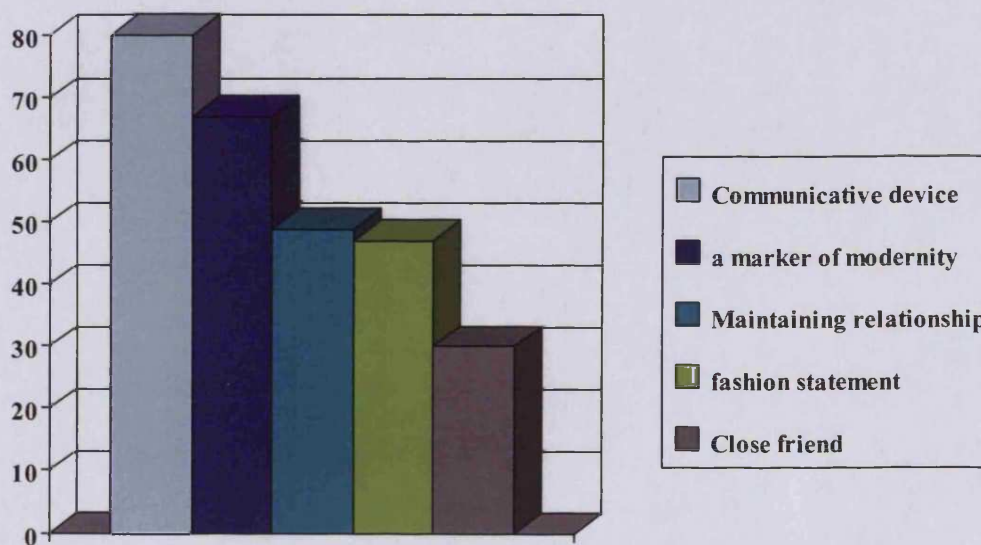
The meanings of mobile phone

Apart from the above statistics, Thai teenagers do not have strong feelings of anger and annoyance when they hear other people's ring tones or when they see people talking loudly on their mobile phones in public settings. This is supported by the survey research (see more details in appendix 1) as more than fifty-six percent of Thai teenagers disagree with the sentence, "*I get quite annoyed when I hear other peoples' mobile phones ring*". Also, nearly fifty percent strongly agree with the sentence of "*If I forget my mobile phone, I seem short of something*". These sentences show that the mobile phone has become a technology of necessity and luxury for Thai teenagers in terms of using the utility of mobile phone in communication and then showing the luxurious mobile phone

to others, as well as keeping in touch with peer groups. Golf's account, one of my research participants in the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, can demonstrate this.

Golf has changed his mobile phones repeatedly since he started using his first mobile phone at 14 years old. He has owned thirteen mobile phone handsets so far. His experience of use of mobile phone can be seen as the source of information among friends. He has become a mobile phone expert in his school. Amongst his peer group, he is called "the mobile phone man" because he is much more knowledgeable about mobile phones than his friends. As Golf says, "*I always go to www.siamphone.com. This website provides new models of mobile phone handsets and the advantages and constraints of mobile phones. This website is quite popular amongst Thai teenagers.*"

Golf bought his Nokia Engage no later than one month after gaining the information from this website and he still loves to play with it all the time, even before going to bed. "*This handset has fulfilled my desire because it has many games, MP3 and stereo. Although it is expensive for my age, I think it is worthwhile. Otherwise, I would have had to buy a Sony walkman, an MP3 player and a Game station separately. Thus, it has become a topic to chat about with girls, as I am perceived as a mobile phone expert.*"

In this regard, Golf's account shows that a new luxurious mobile phone fulfilled his desire that is fitted into his social settings. He perceives his mobile phone as a luxury and a necessity, both of which might be the same in the sense that it is expensive and more comparable to a Walkman than to a game station. This directly elucidates the way in which he displays the device and the situations that might moderate considerations of appropriate use (Katz, Aakhus, Hyo Dong Kim and Turner 2003). In this sense, he finds that the luxurious mobile phone has become a necessity in his everyday life; it makes him appear modern and fashionable in the eyes of his friends. As argued above, the distinction between luxuries and necessities is complex and social which relies on the moral judgements and the consideration of socio-economic life (Livingstone and Lunt 1992). Thus, in the next section, I will make the connection between the meanings of mobile phone as technology of fashion and a symbol of modernity in the modern culture in the sense that fashion can be used to communicate and reproduce positions of economic status, as well as serving as a dynamic of modernity in this regard.

5.3) The technology of fashion as a symbol of modernity

In this section, I will argue that the notion of 'fashion as a symbol of modernity' of mobile phones is inseparable for Thai teenagers in relation to the emerging choices and tastes of hi-tech and fashionable mobile phones that are in fashion. My research will demonstrate how fashion is viewed as a dynamic of modernity and a system of change and innovation in bringing a greater proliferation of mobile phones that might meet needs that require Thai teenagers to make even subtler distinctions between them to identify which ones they desire (Blumer cited in Dant 1999). This contribution brings out my argument that the collective taste of hi-tech mobile phones, which is expressed in fashion, is a product of social interactions and experiences amongst Thai teenagers. I shall look more specifically at how Thai teenagers use their mobile phones as symbolic markers in relation to social expectations, which are caught up in cultural representations of everyday lives (Chaney 2002).

To explicate this point, I will bring out the interpretations of fashionable mobile phone's significance in Thai teenagers' everyday lives to display how the reflexive engagement of the fashionable mobile phone has been seen as means of communication and the establishment of identity, as well as maintaining their social status (Barnard 1996; Chaney 1996). To elaborate this, fashion is seen not as a response to class differentiation and emulation, but in response to "a wish to be in fashion....to express new tastes which are emerging in a changing world" and these wishes may be found in all classes, not only among the elite (Davis 1992:116). These literatures allow me to make the connection of fashion in modern life and the representation of 'good tastes' of Thai teenagers in their everyday interactions to show how fashion is used to construct their identities.

Starting with the assumption that fashionable mobile phones are used as a means of communication and the establishment of identity, I shall draw upon various studies around the world, focusing on the fashion of mobile phones among teenagers, who are aware of fashion aspects in competing to acquire the latest, coolest models and to customize them in the latest and coolest ways (Plant 2001; Fortunati, Katz and Riccini 2003). As well as this, many scholars have looked at the importance of fashion in the lives of teenagers. Fashion not only makes a statement about identity, but can also help teenagers to understand their own identity (Barthes 1957; Davis 1992; Hall 1995). Put

another way, the symbolic identity of fashion and style becomes even more important as a catalyst for social interaction within teen subculture. Furthermore, the fashionable mobile phone becomes an aesthetic pleasure and is a play form of sociation among peer groups (Gronow 1997). My material illustrates the way in which Thai teenagers use fashionable mobile phones as means of expressing their modernity and displaying themselves in public settings in this regard.

Here I draw on my observations in the canteen at St. John school, which is divided into two orientations: the boy school and the girl school. Even though students of this school were divided into two separate schools, they still share common facilities such as canteen, sport field and computer lab together. Thus, many girls and boys have known each other at the canteen by talking and then exchanging their mobile phone numbers. I entered this canteen like other people who want something to eat. Although my presence was regarded by my research participants' group as a researcher[1], they were not interested in my observations and my activities because they were familiar with my role in terms of interviewing and making brief visits with them in the setting covertly or overtly. While I was having lunch, I could also observe other students as part of the setting who were surrounding me and selected their outstanding interactions with mobile phones within peer groups.

On one occasion, I observed a group of four schoolgirls who sat beside my table; they all had the same style of digital mobile phones. Moreover, they decorated their mobile phones with coloured straps and little dolls hanging on the tops of the phones. I noticed that each of them used a strap of a different colour according to their characteristics. This group stood out from other students who were having lunch in the surrounding area. They played with their mobile phones constantly: for example, some of them were showing pictures; some were texting messages while eating; and some kept changing their ring tones. After these activities, they gossiped and hid to take a picture of a good looking boy who was sitting next to them.

Suddenly, a cute girl who wore long hair and had big eyes from this group went to bring an empty dish and a glass of water with a straw from the handsome boy who had just left the table next to them. When she returned to her table, her friends went crazy over all the things that she had brought by screaming and jumping. They took turns to take pictures

with all the stuffs on each mobile phone. Then, they displayed these pictures that they had taken from different angles. Apart from taking pictures, the cute girl smelt the used straw and then passed it to her friends, who took turns to smell the straw. Then, she pressed her lips onto the straw as if she was kissing his lips. And then, her friends took pictures of this on their mobile phones.

This observation demonstrates that digital mobile phones have become fashionable and cool activities among friends. Pictures taken on mobile phones, on the one hand, become evidence of their identities that has been saved in the picture boxes and then are shown to other friends so as to share meanings between members of groups. On the other hand, the action of the cute girl printing her lip onto the used straw, captured by the digital mobile phone, can indicate modern and cool people displaying themselves towards other groups who noticed these behaviours, as well as demonstrating social interaction vis-à-vis mobile phones. The account of the girls' group shows Thai teenagers fashion or puts together their communicative presence through mobile phone accessories. Thus, the meaning of various technologies and their placement in personal communication and social relationships (Katz and Aakhus 2002) are central to Thai teenagers' sense of fashion (Katz, Aakhus, Hyo Dong Kim and Turner 2002).

Partly similar to clothes, the fashionable mobile phone offers a dynamic field for studying the culturally available commodity forms and the construction of identity. That is, mobile phones are not simply material objects of practical use, but also acquire meanings and values that have been transferred to Thai teenagers within a fashion system (Jagose 2003). Being the unplugged generation or *Deck Neaw* (see more details in the next chapter), Thai teenagers have incorporated mobile phones into their everyday lives not only for communicating but also for presenting themselves as modern and high-tech associated with their clothing styles and their music. As Claire Lobet-Maris (2003:87) puts it, "for young people, the mobile phone is not only a practical object with which one communicates but also an object invested with a high degree of symbolic significance and a large factor in the constitution of one's personal identity".

In other words, the mobile phone serves symbolic functions, denoting their owners as 'cool', 'chick' 'fashion' 'hi-tech', 'modern', 'young' and 'fresh', rather than material functions for a communicative use. As Immanuel Kant (cited in Gronow 1997:78)

remarks, the fashion pattern satisfies the demand for novelty; it means the sense of experiencing something new which is essential to fashion. Today, communication technologies, especially mobile phones that reside near the body, also embody tastes and fashion. Seen in this light, Thai teenagers are involved with fashion as a "second skin" or elaborated as "social cosmetic" (*Nha Kak* in Thai terms) in order to express presumptions about communicative settings while also projecting a sense of being cool and modern signifying how others should engage with them (Fortunati, Katz and Riccini 2003). My material brings out how fashionable mobile phone has become a means of expressing their identities in this regard.

To me, the mobile phone has become a communicative device which is in fashion and looks beautiful. In our group, we often search for the latest model of mobile phone to be launched. If someone in our gang buys the latest fashionable mobile phone, it seems to us that we can lift up our social faces and the high status of our gang identity (Neng, a male university student, 21 years old).

In analysing this, *Neng*, a 21-year-old university student, uses the mobile phone for connecting people while he is also signifying an image of the kind of person one is or wishes to be seen. My interpretation can be viewed as an aspect of fashionable mobile consumption, elaborating on Featherstone (2003)'s contribution that fashionable mobile phones place a premium on youth and good looks. In fact, to look better, younger and more attractive has become a desire for most of us because people who look good are made to feel good. It is the main focus of pleasure seeking (Campbell 1987). Therefore, this allows me to make the connection that fashion is associated with the representation of modernity and it becomes key resources of visual statement to others.

As previously noted, Thai teenagers use fashionable mobile phones as a framework for the construction of their identities in relation to being a cool and modern person as a symbol of modernity (Miles 1998). However, they might not construct these identities directly through the fashionable mobile phones they use, but rather through peer group relationships. As Simmel (1971) claims, fashion can serve as a force that unites people who belong to the same group in that the individuals feel fulfilled through the fashionable mobile phones, with a sense that they belong, but this fulfilment is

ultimately social and not individual (Miles 1998:91). In this context, I refer to Tabb's account that his father bought him a Sony Ericsson P800, a businessman's model. Tabb used this mobile phone handset not only to fulfil his achievement of being like a businessman, but also because this model serves the purpose of drawing attention from his peer group.

Apart from Tabb's account, however, Thai teenagers appear to need to be social and individual at the same time. As Barnard (1996) maintains, fashion and clothing are ways in which this complex set of desires or demands may be negotiated. This is a paradox to what Wilson (1992) contributes by pointing out that "we want to look like our friends but not to be clones" about individual agency (Wilson 1992:34). It may be demonstrated that the need to distinguish oneself from everyone else is perhaps strongest with regard to the group "to which one has the strongest affiliation" (Wilson ibid:34). This demonstration allows me to bring out the following encounter from my fieldwork to demonstrate this.

One day in the summer of 2004, I heard that Mo had changed his mobile phone. He now had the same model as Golf, the Nokia Engage. When we met, he showed me how he operated the functions of the Nokia Engage. He said, "*even though I bought the same model, it was developed to have more functions than Golf's*". Therefore, he further said, "*I use my mobile phone for more worthwhile purposes than him: his main purpose is listening to music. The Nokia Engage serves me more than that; for example, I access the Internet and use GPRS to download files.*"

Thus, the Nokia Engage can be regarded as an example to show how fashionable mobile phones are associated with class competition by a process of emulation. The way in which the fashion of hi-tech mobile phones used by upper class Thai teenagers (including Golf), in this sense he comes from the new rich middle class, can now be seen in the lower class Thai teenagers (including Mo), in this sense the median middle class. As noted in chapter 2, the mobile phone use has constantly shifted from the elite class to other classes in Thai society, especially Thai teenagers.

To support this, my survey research reveals that more than sixty-five percent of Thai teenagers strongly agree with the sentence of *I think mobile phones have become a fashion for teens*. This survey allows me to show that mobile phones, as personal

instruments of communication, must not only be an object of beauty, but also modernity and fashion. This can be illustrated in the process of differentiation and social emulation amongst Thai teenagers, especially with regard to using second-hand mobile phone handsets in comparison to new mobile phones. Put in another way, fashion becomes dominant and may lead to ever-present tension among friends in terms of conspicuous consumption (Corrigan 1997). This enables me to illustrate that Thai teenagers want to be like their peer groups by using the same models and styles of mobile phones, and that they buy second-hand mobile phone handsets to set up their identities. Two of my research participants can demonstrate this as follows:

I saw one friend of my group bought the first hand model of Nokia XXX. I really wanted it at that moment but I had to wait for a few months. It is because the price is getting lower, especially the second handset; sometimes it is lower than 50 % but it depends on which model. So, just a few months later I can use the same model as my friend does with a lower price (Tee, a male university student, 21 years old).

I like to buy the second hand mobile phone that makes me always in trend and in fashion as well as the first hand mobile phone. Sometimes when a certain model is a hit, I can own it right away; meanwhile, other friends are still using the old model (Champs, a male university student, 21 years old).

Although the second hand mobile phone can reduce the stress of peer groups as having to use the same model, some of my research participants believed that the first hand mobile phone is regarded as much more modern and beautiful and, somehow causes less problems. As one of my research participants explains, *I have experienced using a second hand mobile phone. I needed to fix it often. It brought me shame when I could not use it in front of my friends. My friends always ironically said to me that it was because it was second-hand* (Bud, senior high school, 17 years old). This is related to another account that perceives the first hand model handset as more modern; *However, I believe that new mobile phones are more beautiful than second-hand ones. In particular, they are upgraded, with higher technology and more functions, and are perceived as more modern* (Bert, a male university student, 21 years old).

In this respect, fashion is an appropriate topic for discussion because it is clearly a mode of action that has been stimulated by the development of consumer industries (Chaney 1996). On the other hand, fashion means repetition as in same model of mobile phone, but which mobile phone is a very desirable state of affairs is indeed from the point of view of manufacturers (Corrigan 1997:9). In other words, the fashion adoption process is a progression of buying waves that develop when a given style is popularly accepted in one group and then moves on to other groups until it finally falls out of fashion (Michman et al. 2003). This is seen in the mobile phone accessories i.e. cheap mobile straps, illuminated antennae and colourful masks and pockets. This fashion of mobile phone decoration has moved from Teens and Tweens up to adults. My fieldwork experience illustrates this:

At Vee's house, I noticed that Nam Warn, Vee's younger sister, was playing with a pink masked mobile phone. It was decorated with an illuminated antenna at its head and its colour screen showed a cartoon pig running around. At first, I thought this mobile phone belonged to her, but, she said, "*It belongs to my mother. My mother was born in the Year of the Pig. She likes pigs a lot and always decorates her mobile phone. Sometimes, my sister and my mother swap mobile phone accessories to decorate their phones.*"

In analysing this, the mobile phone decorations i.e. the pink mask and a cartoon of pig of Vee's mother can be demonstrated critically in relation to age and preference in that it shows an ideology of 'girlishness', 'infancy' and 'femininity' between Vee's mother and both of daughters as they like to swap their decorations. To interpret this, Vee's mother wants to get close to her children by using the same fashion. This discussion brings out the spread of fashion which sometimes travels horizontally and simultaneously in a number of social classes (McCracken 1985). In this sense, the adoption process for fashions in relation to market segmentation in the sense that people have been differentiated according to choices and tastes are investigated (Michman et al. 2003). To elaborate, various mobile phones with different functions, such as picture phones, videophones and models with colour screens are introduced at the same time with exclusive high prices, medium prices and low prices, and lastly second hand prices. My material suggests that most Thai teenagers perceive that people who use the hi-tech and fashionable mobile phones are of good tastes (called *Rot Niyom* in Thai). These good tastes indicate wealth and modernity of people, as previously noted in chapter 2.

Thus, fashionable mobile phones may be defined with different meanings depending on cultural settings and the ways in which mobile phones are used in each group. My observations in the Tween and Teen groups reveal that Tweens give significance to their mobile phones as "symbol of modernity" in relation to fashion and high technology to a greater extent than the Teens. To support this, my survey research reveals that digital mobile phones, colour screens, polyphonic ring-tones and folding covers including MP 3 stereos, film previews and Internet facilities are widely used amongst Tweens and cited as their favourite features. Meanwhile, Teens prefer the video function (see more details in Appendix 1).

To conclude, fashionable mobile phones have been recognized as key elements in young people's expression, exploration and marking of their own individual and collective identities (Willis 1990:85). In other words, the mobile phone can be seen as a key symbol of modernity in the post-modern era, which represents the flexibility of meaning, associated with fashion and pleasure and the symbolic significance of the technology (Mackey 1997). This appropriation use of the mobile phone as a technology of fashion as a symbol of modernity leads to a discussion of another aspect: the perception of mobile phones as a throwaway technology, as connoted by parents, in order to show the moral economy in the household will follow in the next section.

5.4) The mobile phone as throwaway technology

This section aims to discuss the moral economy of Thai teenagers and their parents in order to show how mobile phones are connoted as hi-technology, fashion and modernity for Thai teenagers but are seen as throwaway or rubbish technology by their parents, who are concerned about necessity rather than luxury. This concern is connected with the previous section in order to show the moral economy of Thai teenagers and family in relation to the consumption of mobile phones proceeding in this chapter. In this sense, the term 'throwaway or rubbish technology' means that old or outdated mobile phone handsets will be accumulated at home, useless and worthless because they are out of fashion. Thus, my research will tease out the connections of mobile phones as necessity and luxury vis-à-vis fashion and a symbol of modernity, which have become key factors in relation to the consumption of technologies in the household, by showing that young people and parents are interrelating in terms of the symbolic appropriation of use.

To take account of different connotations of mobile phones, my research will highlight two examples in order to consider how the meanings of mobile phones are shaped by the complexities of family interactions (Strathern 1992). The accounts are from Vee and his father along with Mo and his mother, who have experienced household disputes over mobile phones. As Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley (1992:19) claim, different families draw on different cultural resources, based on religious beliefs, personal biographies or the culture of a network of family and friends, and as a result, construct a bounded environment in home. To give more details, Vee and Mo have been raised in different environments at home and the value of mobile phone uses are related to the moral economy with regard to the nuances of necessity and luxury and the incorporation of domesticated technology in household. My observation of both families will show how the family members have an experience with mobile phones in everyday life in order to show how the meanings of mobile phone are embedded in necessity and luxury

In Vee's family, everyone has their own communicative devices. For example, his father owns a Nokia 8210 handset with AIS network. He tells me that he bought this handset with a cheap price because at that time AIS network was going to change the service system from 900 bands to GSM system. Therefore, he could buy this handset for just only 13,500 Baht from the real price of 18,000 Baht. Vee's mum used a Nokia 3350 of DTAC network. Afterward, Vee used to use his mother's mobile phone before he lost it in a taxi. Vee's elder sister used to use a PCT (Personal Communication Telephone) before she moved to live in a dormitory. She found that PCT could not receive the signal well. Thus, she bought a new mobile phone half on her own savings, while her father paid the rest. Afterwards, Vee took the PCT of his sister until he bought a Sony Ericsson T200 of Thai Mobile network. Later, Vee's younger sister owns the PCT that used to be her sister's. She also wants to use Vee's mobile phone after Vee bought a new one. This is because PCT used to belong to her mother and Vee.

This finding is slightly different from Mo's family. When I visit Mo at home, I notice that Mo's parents buy everything new for Mo and his brother separately. This may prevent them from disputing over their belongings. However, they exchange their other toys to play with pleasures. At home, I see everyone has their own favourite corners in the house. Mo has his own multi-media computer as same as his father's. Mo's younger brother has a video game station which he likes to play everyday. Mo has only one younger brother

(14 years old) who studies at the same school. However, Mo's brother does not have a mobile phone; therefore, he always uses the public telephone booth to call Mo on his mobile phone in order to check what time they will go home together. Mo's father works as government officer and his mother works at a private accounting company. They use Nokia handsets with the post-paid service of the AIS network. They use their mobile phones to contact each other and their children. Mo's mother always calls Mo on his mobile phone each day to tell him to clean the house before she comes home. Furthermore, Mo has a responsibility to take care of his younger brother if his parents come home late.

According to my observation, this engagement involves the appropriation of mobile phones through their incorporations, and is redefined in different terms in accordance with each household's values and interests. These differences contribute to my argument in the sense that Thai teenagers use their mobile phone as part of being cool and modern. This investigation allows me to highlight the moral economy in relation to the structure of authority. That is, Thai children are expected to respect their parents and behave according to parents' opinions, while consumerism may seem to be a contradictory issue between children and parents in Thai families. To explicate, parents try to cultivate the economical values to children but children like to buy things emulating fashion and peer groups. By this, below I further discuss the two households to show that my material reflects upon the perception of buying for family or for the children where parents are trying to make sense of what is the best for their offspring (Haddon 1992) as regards mobile phones. On the other hand, from the children's point of view, "the use-value of an object began to become less important than its fashion value; if it ain't broke, throw it out anyway" (Corrigan 1997:9). This statement leads me to analyse my material in the sense that the old-fashioned mobile phone is perceived as useless and this value has become the new way that Thai teenagers view goods, in particular mobile phones. My fieldwork experience in the two households illustrates this as follows.

By frequent visiting, I become a familiar person in Vee's family. One day, when Vee and I arrived home, Vee's father asked him why he had kept his phone switched off all afternoon without any consideration. He had tried to contact Vee several times and had become annoyed. Vee argued that he had not switched off his mobile phone. Rather, because of the poor signals of Thai Mobile, his network was not efficient in some areas.

However, his father did not believe that it had been a problem with the signal, and raised the issue that Vee had switched off his mobile phone. This meant that his family lost contact with him and were very concerned. Going directly to the point, Vee asked his father to buy him a new mobile phone in order to avoid this problem. These led to a half-hour dispute between Vee and his father, and other family members, Vee's mother and his younger sister, and I were also drawn into the discussion (see more details on VCD).

Vee's father accepted that having mobile phone nowadays has become part of everyday life; as he said, "*in Bangkok today, parents have to work outside home. Therefore, a mobile phone has become part of everyday life to reduce tension and anxiety. If our children have mobile phones, we can keep in touch with them and to check up on them*". Yet, he still insisted that the role of the mobile phone is only for connection, not for fashion, and that Thai teenagers are misled to use phones in that way. As he put it, "*I do not agree with some adverts for mobile phone systems that use teenagers as presenters. They have launched too many models. Now, we have digital cameras in mobile phones. In the near future, this technology may not be enough for fashion. So, we have to change mobile phones again and again despite using them as usual.*" This was why he would not buy a new phone for Vee. However, Vee had his own reasons to argue with his father. Some of the dispute can demonstrate this:

> **Dad: Why do you want to change your mobile phone?**
>
> *Vee: One reason is that my mobile phone was designed to use with the Tri band. Actually, it can only be used with one band in Thailand, 1800 GSM, and the signal is not good in some areas. I have already tested it with my friends' networks. Another reason is that this handset is out of fashion.*
>
> **Dad: But if you changed your mobile phone, how much are you going to pay for the best one or the latest one or the cheap one?**
>
> *Vee: The best one! There are different levels. The best one is ten thousand Baht (150 £).*
>
> **Dad: Where is ten thousand Baht going?**
>
> *Vee: Going...to... going to the mobile phone owner.*
>
> **Dad: Who is the owner?**
>
> *Vee: Foreigners.*
>
> **Dad: See! That is trade deficit. So, where is your ex-mobile phone going?**

Vee: I will sell it to the second-hand mobile phone market.

Dad: Why don't you think about a person who will buy it? He will have the same problem as you in terms of selling his old mobile phone in the second hand market.

Vee: That is his business!

Dad: This is the thinking of Thai people. We do not think for the next generation. Old mobile phones have become <u>rubbish technology</u>. They will accumulate more and more in the future.

In this regard, the connotation of mobile phone as throwaway or rubbish technology brings out the problem of modernity, in this sense, the contradiction of representation of being cool and modern between the father and Vee. This, however, is seen differently by another family like Mo's family. For example, Mo's parents view that the mobile phone can build up Mo's confidence and it can present him to have cool identities to others (Hirsch, 1992). On the other hand, Vee's father saw that the mobile phone is for necessity and it is not for luxury. However, it seems Vee had yet another reason: he gave the example of Mo and his mother, who had allowed Mo to buy a new Nokia Engage. As he put it, *"Mo's mother allowed him to buy a new one and Mo repaid his mother later, as I can repay you."* Nevertheless, Vee' father persuaded him that, *"we are different from Mo's family; Mo has to look after his brother and keeps his house clean because his parents don't have much time to take care of them. But you, you have your mother to take care of you when you come home. You do not have any big responsibilities at all."*

It seems that Vee could not argue on this point. Thus, he dragged up another point, claiming that his father was a conservative person and did not understand teenagers' minds and fashion. Vee accepted that he was ashamed to use the old model in front of his friends. He wanted a model with a colour screen, a digital camera and Internet access, not like his grey screen, which could not be used for anything except making and receiving calls. He negotiated that if his father allowed him to buy it, he would do everything such as house cleaning, studying harder and taking care of his younger sister. Moreover, he would not change his mobile phone for several years. However, this dispute ended with another point. His father allowed him to install high-speed Internet instead of having a new mobile phone. As he put it, *"I think the Internet is more important than a new model of mobile phone. You can get more benefits from the Internet than from a mobile phone.*

In contrast to Vee's family, I visited Mo's family two days later. Mo was happily playing with his new mobile phone. I asked Mo's mother why she had given Mo permission to buy a new mobile phone. She said, "*I'm happy when I see him happy. Actually, Mo is likely to stay at home rather than going out to roam around with friends. He's a good boy so he deserves to have a new model. He has kept his promise that he will collect his savings to repay me and will not change this model until his loan is repaid, which will take two years. Thus, having a new model now will suppress his desire for a next mobile phone for two years.*

My material has thus revealed that each of the two households has particular moral economy and unique culture which provides the basis for the security and identity of the household or the family as a whole, as well as that of its individual members (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley 1992:18). Consequently, this section has illustrated that the household economy is part of the representation of modernity. In this sense, it is dynamically involved in the public world of the production and exchange of commodities and meanings through mobile phones, which have an impact on the social and economic order of the household. In this regard, the mobile phone can be viewed as a transformation of family interaction, which provides an important context in generating the meanings of mobile phone in terms of modernity.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented different meanings of mobile phones regarding missed calls, the technology of necessity and luxuries, and the technology of fashion as a symbol of modernity amongst Thai teenagers. On the other hand, it has shown that parents connote mobile phones as a throwaway or rubbish technology, in contrast to those meanings mentioned above. Based on ethnographic material, this chapter demonstrates that the meanings of mobile phones have entered the space of symbolic functions as part of material functions in such a way that Thai teenagers use luxurious mobile phones to construct and maintain their identity and self-expression through social emulation and the power of fashion.

Furthermore, the institution of fashion has influenced Thai teenagers' everyday lives, leading to the collapse of the spaces between luxury and necessity in their moral judgments and subsequently to different perceptions between Thai teenagers and their parents with regard to mobile phone purchase. This finding allows me to discuss the resistance to authority through the visual style of mobile phones, which may be seen differently by teenagers and their parents. In this regard, the research shows that fashionable mobile phones have been seen as a means of communication and of establishment of the forms of identity in modern culture. New and second-hand mobile phone handsets may be regarded as playing a role in the distinction of communication and the establishment of identity, as well as maintaining Thai teenagers' social status among their peer groups.

The next chapter will tease out the significance of lifestyles associated with the social institution of fashion. More specifically, the dynamics of change in different modes of fashion will be shown to reflect processes of lifestyle formation (Chaney 1996:49). I will consider how mobile phones are signifying practices in terms of generating meanings that produce and reproduce cultural groups, referred to in Tween and Teen subculture alongside their positions of relative power and new identity, for example *Gig* and *Deck Neaw*, forms of youth expression, and which may relate to sub-cultural settings as described by culture (Hebdige 1979; Hall 1991). The way Thai teenagers use mobile phones as means of expression can be elaborated as a way of seeking pleasure in their leisure activities at home, school and department stores; these activities will be explored in terms of habitus. It will be highlighted that individual tastes and styles are shaped by social patterns.

Notes

[1] Since November, 2003, the paper of asking for permission as showing my research role had been sent to the Head of St. John School before conducting my observation.

Chapter 6

Tween and Teen subculture
And the New Form of Youth Expression

In this chapter, I will explore Tween and Teen subcultures[1] in various settings in terms of their everyday lives vis-à-vis fashion and, particularly, the mobile communication. My argument now therefore develops around the way in which Tween and Teen groups, who varied on the demographic data such as age, gender, education and socio-economic status, take the mobile phones as an integral part of their identities to differentiate their lifestyles and leisure activities. The study also brings out the psychographic data (i.e. taste, choice, preference and attitude) in relation to the construction of meanings of mobile phone in their everyday lives.

Those subcultures in questions are locally called *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* in which I will explore how such identity formation emerged in the subcultures of Thai youth. In this context a *Gig* refers to a person who prefers to date several boy/girlfriends at the same time with no commitment and she/he used mobile phones as intimate devices to correlate with the courtship. In the meantime, a *Deck Neaw* refers to a 'modern person' who is obsessive about technology, fashion and mobile communication. I also look at the *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* subcultures from the perspective of modernity as they incorporated mobile phones to create a new lifestyle and a new form of identity. Thus, my research will demonstrate how *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* indicate the new form of youth expression as the emergence of particular new identities in Thai contemporary society in the 21st century.

This investigation allows me to show the cultural transformations of the groups in terms of gender or status that leads to a sense of identity between those who share habitus in using mobile phones (Bourdieu 1984). To elaborate, habitus linked social structures and individual action, and referred to the embodiment in individual actors of systems of social norms, understanding and patterns of behaviour (Hiller and Rooksby 2002). Thus, my research elaborates habitus on *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* subculture by showing the ways of thinking and acting, as well as group custom

through their visual styles relating to the fashionable mobile phones (Hulme 2003a); Jenks 2005). In this sense, the *Gig* and *Deak Neaw* subculture are viewed as useful ways of representing processes of collaborative social action and characterizing the activities of identified groups (Martin 2003:23). These literatures lead me to further consider how 'subcultural ideology implicitly gives alternative interpretations and values to young people's class and status; it re-interprets the social world' (Thornton 1995). The interpretation of the social world is fitted into the concept of habitus which is elaborated by the *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* subcultures. The connection is made to consider how the image of self or the social identity becomes the representation of those teens of which the individuals present to outside social world (Truch and Hulme 2004).

Tween and Teen's leisure lifestyles are investigated here to illustrate habitus in such a way that lifestyles are 'an active expression of not only relationship between the individual and society, but also people's relationship to social and cultural changes' (Miles 2000:16). I build on these literatures by demonstrating that Tween and Teen subcultures have experienced with their mobile phone uses in relation to the lifestyle patterns and leisure activities and these subsequently are correlated with the new form of youth expression, *Gig and Deak Neaw*. These new identities considered as deviant behaviours or 'a resistance to conformity'[2] will be examined with regard to the fact that they are changing traditional Thai norm (Jenks 2005). A traditional Thai norm that its people should conform emphasises that Thai teenagers should behave in good manners and specifically should not be flirtatious. Nonetheless, the *Gig* culture is seen as resistant to Thai norm in such a way that Thai teenagers have freedom to date with several people at the same time with no commitment.

Focusing upon this point, I will scrutinize how Tween and Teen subcultures express their resistance to Thai traditional culture perceived publicly as authority through the visual styles of mobile phones: for example, the various models of mobile phones i.e. video phone and camera phone, as well as the mobile phone accessories i.e. strap, mask and bag. Furthermore, the clothing styles, tastes and choice of mobile phone use are also illustrated through two subcultures of *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* in order to show how lifestyles of *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* have emerged as complex processes of self-

presentation and social differentiation in modern society (see Hebdige 1979; Hall et al. 1975; Willis 1990; Thornton 1995; Martin 2003).

6.1) Tween and Teen's leisure lifestyles in Gig Culture

According to the literature review, the following authors in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) have exerted an influence on my subculture's study in different ways. Firstly, I shall draw upon Hebdige (1979)'s study to look at how the youth subcultures express their resistance through visual styles such as the fashion and dress codes, as well as new technology and mobile communication that are challenging the dominant culture. This is related to my overall arguments about the way in which Tween and Teen adopt mobile phones to show their expression of modernity as being cool and modern and show the class distinction relating to subculture. Secondly, I shall adopt Hall et al (1976)'s work to consider why a particular subculture is a cultural style representing certain core values and signifying such values to the members of the subculture. To elaborate, I shall look at Thai middle class teenagers in the *Gig* subculture who demonstrate the freedom of courtship in the modern culture which is seen as a resistance to Thai traditional norm. Thirdly, I shall follow Willis (1990)'s argument as most Thai teenagers are actually involved with the prevalence of expressions, signs and symbols of fashion and mobile phone through which individuals and groups seek creatively to establish their presence, identity and meanings. More specifically, I focus on the media cultural commodities like film and advertising, including popular music e.g. Japanese Indie music and Hip Hop music, to demonstrate how Thai teenagers use these media cultural commodities relating to their mobile phones in order to create their identities of being cool and modern.

Based on these engagements, the Japanese Indie music, Dave and Hip hop styles as symbolic capital (see Gelder and Thornton 1997)[3] is as important for social differentiation as the accumulation of economic capital where individuals and groups struggle to acquire and reinvest it to maintain social status (Stahl 2003:32). Put another way, a style has become a form of resistance in the sense that the visual and style move away from the commodities and the use-value but adopt the symbolic value (see Muggleton 1997). As I argued, the concept of lifestyle in relation to *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* here focuses on the issue of Thai teenagers' creativity in such a way

that commodities, whose meanings are generated at the level of the everyday through the inscription of collective meanings (Benett and Kahn-Harris 2003:13), function as a cultural resource (Fiske 1989). This argument brings out the connections of the way Thai teenagers generated the constructions of meanings vis-à-vis mobile phones, as previously discussed, through their tastes and visual styles of *Gig* and *Deck Neaw*, the new forms of expression in this regard.

One of the connections exists specifically in the *Gig* culture, a group identity that displays deviant behaviours in such a way that Thai teenagers, in particular Thai girls, expresses a form of resistance in terms of dating with several people to present their popularity and to be modern people. They resist Thai norm by having sex freely with others. This interaction of Thai teenagers brings about the changes in Thai norm following the western values. They are part of the process of change in the context of modernity through these interactions by initiatively flirting with men and expressing explicit feelings in relation to mobile phone use. Meanwhile, the *Deck Neaw* culture presents the culture of niche marketing by means of wearing the second hand clothes, adoring underground music and using high technologies such as iPod, MP3 players and high-tech mobile phones. Through these subcultures, my research illuminates that Thai teenagers "imagine their own and other social groups which assert their distinctive character and affirm that they are not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass (Thornton 1995:10)."

By investigating this point, this section shows the differentiation of Tween and Teen who use their mobile phones as the intimate devices to enhance their leisure private form of activities in the *Gig* culture (see Furlong and Cartmel 1997). For example, they store their *Gigs*' mobile phone numbers to show their popularities in leisure time. To build up this argument, I have paid attention to individual lifestyles as features of 'modernity' in choosing certain mobile phone brands to show the patterns of consumption that are associated with peer groups and families who shape social norms and values for them, as well as to articulate the mobile phone uses as modes of personal expression (Chaney 1996 and Bennett 2003). In this context, the concept of lifestyle is a good example of a new social form in terms of modernity to show a distinctively modern form of status grouping as distinct from traditional lifestyles (Chaney, ibid). This contribution enables me to show that the modern lifestyles are

based on Thai teenagers' choices and leisure patterns that "structure social identification and economic practices have to be grasped as representation (Chaney, 2001:82)".

The data show that the majority of Thai teenagers' leisure and lifestyles are likely to incorporate the communication technology, in particular the mobile phone, in their everyday lives. They use mobile phones in order to facilitate the convenient lifestyle with more connection and more communication and to seek their pleasure activities i.e. texting, sending photos, shooting video clips and browsing web pages, as well as to incorporate the phones into the modern courtship. For example, Thai teenagers in the *Gig* culture nowadays use their mobile phones to court each other and store their *Gigs*' mobile phone numbers and picture files as their hobbies.

This finding leads to the connections of the distinctions of how Tweens and Teens in the *Gig* culture use mobile phones to incorporate their leisure lifestyles as a process of habitus that is learnt through interactive practices, as noted earlier. By doing so, this section will bring out the material of young people who are an index of social norms and a barometer of social changes (see Jennings 2002; Miles ibid) to look at how they expressed their new identities of *Gigs* in the local context. In this sense, the *Gig* as a new identity shows that the modern courtship of Thai teenagers now has socialised the western value, as part of the change process, in terms of independency and modernisation. This allows me to explore how the mobile phone can tell us about the routine lives, including the courtship of especially young people in modern culture.

This demonstration is relevant to Kopomaa (2000:3)'s contribution in the sense that Thai teenagers use their mobile phones to promote and intensify the leisure-oriented urban lifestyle as I have been arguing throughout the thesis. To elaborate this, my material looks at how one of my research participants, *Tabb*, a 14 year old in Tween group, incorporates his mobile phone with his leisure time. This can be seen in *Tabb* and his peer group. They are a group of classmates which is consisted of 6-7 people and are quite close together. They call each other on mobile phones even though they have just talked in school to show a good care to each other and to keep company during the weekend. As he notes, *some weekends my friends and I have an appointment at a department store to see a movie or to eat some great food. They*

always call me to go out because they get bored to stay home at the weekend. So, I am willing to accompany them if I don't work with parents (Tabb, 14 years old). This finding is analysed that Tabb and his peer group incorporate the mobile phone not only to build up their relationships in the leisure time but also to promote their sense of boredom in the urban lifestyle.

Up to this point, Rutledge's (1992:15) contribution can explain Thai teenagers in urban areas that "generally, in Bangkok, specifically, the educational system has moved away from a religiously centred system to a secular system with professional teachers. When the day of formal classes are over, urban Thai youth, like their counterparts in the west, like to "hang out", "get together" or just "roam around". With plenty of entertainment complexes, fast food restaurants and rock or Indies concerts, most Thai teenagers, especially in Bangkok, are likely to spend their free time with others of their own age rather than with family. This allows me to consider that the *Gig* culture of Thai teenagers is part of modernity which is related to cultural changes.

In this regard, these Thai teen behaviours bring many concerns to a lot of Thai scholars and parents who are worried (see Panida Swoangseriwanich 2004 and Pradtana Supapaporn 2004) about Thai teenagers' characteristics that have changed with the influence of the globalization, peer groups and consumerism by means of brand addiction, eating junk food and chatting on the Internet and the mobile phones in the contemporary Thai society. Furthermore, the most concern about Thai teenagers now is about them having sex at school age and about teens dating with different girlfriends/boyfriends at the same time as they call these people *Gigs* rather than lovers.

In this context, Thai traditions insist that Thai people, especially the girls should have a single mind and behave well towards partners without having an affair. They should at all times preserve such good manners as not having sex with several people. Now, this aspect has changed in the 21st century relating with the mobile phone which becomes a linkage to create this *Gig* relationship. Thus, the *Gig* culture nowadays brings many concerns to Thai families and society as Thai teenagers express their freedom in dating and co-habitations which reflects a dominant presence of Thai

traditional customs in Thai modern culture. My research is going to shed light on this matter. To give an example, *Tabb*, one of my research participants who expresses himself as a gay further narrates the way he met his *Gig* and the way he keeps their relationship through mobile phone. His sexual orientation as gay is conceived as being a form of 'deviance' (see During 2005) and the new identity in Tween's subculture which is relevant to the sense of freedom in dating with people. As he put, *I got to know him through the introduction of my friends. Actually, I had ever met him in the public several times but he didn't know me. It seems to me he is a very nice guy. Even though I talked with him via mobile phones for two times, each call consumed a lot of time; I knew that I can get along well with him* (Tabb, 14-year-old).

According to *Tabb*'s account, the mobile phone is inevitably incorporated in his leisure lifestyles and especially with his *Gig*. This account shows the instantaneous relationship between *Tabb* and his *Gig* vis-à-vis the mobile phone. This becomes an intimate and mysterious relationship when compared to a person who is actually a boyfriend/girlfriend. Among *Tabb*'s groups, *Tabb* is close to a chubby boyfriend who took a picture with him by the mobile phone. Then, *Tabb* saved this picture as his mobile phone wallpaper to show everyone that this guy is his special boyfriend not merely as a *Gig*. On the other hand, he keeps his *Gig*'s picture and mobile phone's number in his secret. Along with *Tabb*'s behaviour, this allows me to demonstrate a characteristic of Tween's behaviour in different genders that it is related to the Gig's relationship. As noted earlier, Tabb's sexuality as gay can be seen as more open to talking or dating with other people than girls. Additionally, he dares to exchange his mobile phone number to the stranger that he has just known from his friends. The sexual liberation of gay is regarded as a cool, new way of relationship through mobile phone.

This is contrary to Tween girls' account like *Weaw*, a 14-year-old, one of my research participants who illustrates the social interaction with the mobile phone in relation to the courtship in the *Gig* culture. In particular, when hanging around with friends, this Tween girl is quite more careful than Tween boys like Tabb was. This contradiction allows me to develop my argument in the sense that Thai teenagers integrate the mobile phone as part of being cool and modern in their own ways. Regarding this, I draw upon Weaw's account to exemplify in this light.

At the weekend, Weaw spends her time on Saturday afternoon studying at a tutorial school where she meets a new friend there. To give mobile phone number for a new friend is a way to introduce each other. As she says, *"I think giving the mobile phone number to other people is safer than give the home phone number. If I don't like to pick up the incoming call of this guy, I can delete it and this can imply the sense of rejection. In my gang, we cannot give others our mobile phone numbers without permission. Yet, for someone who I cannot trust, I do not give my mobile phone number. I give them the wrong number."* In this regard, Weaw's account can show that the reference group relationships are an important influence in her age. She did tell me that she does not have any boyfriends but sometimes she has a crush on someone who does not know her. Put in another way, she secretly loves someone else who she called a *Gig*. As she put, *"it is a kind of Gig but I don't give any importance to this matter. It's because I think Gig's relationship is not certain."* This finding enables me to show the connection of *Gig* relationship vis-à-vis the mobile phones built on Thai teenagers' identities.

According to my research participants' accounts, Tabb and Waew who are a Tween boy and girl give the significance to *Gigs* and make meanings of *Gigs* in different ways. This allows me to show in this regard the meanings of *Gig* which are correlated with leisure and lifestyles of Thai teenagers. As I noted before in chapter 1, *Gig* refers to a person who has freedom in love, dating anyone with no commitment. Also, it refers to a person who matches well in talks and tastes. Such deviant behaviour has extensively occurred amongst Thai teenagers like a fashion. In particular among my research participants, having a *Gig* signifies the expression of being a cool Teen in front of their friends. To discuss this point, the *Gig* culture as local interactions has engaged the images of global cultures as part of modernity i.e. the freedom of dating people and the high self-confidence. That is, Thai teenagers have familiarize themselves with this notion through the media and cinema showing the scenes of teens having sex freely, as well as through the culture of cohabitation (see Sreberny-Mohammadi 1996).
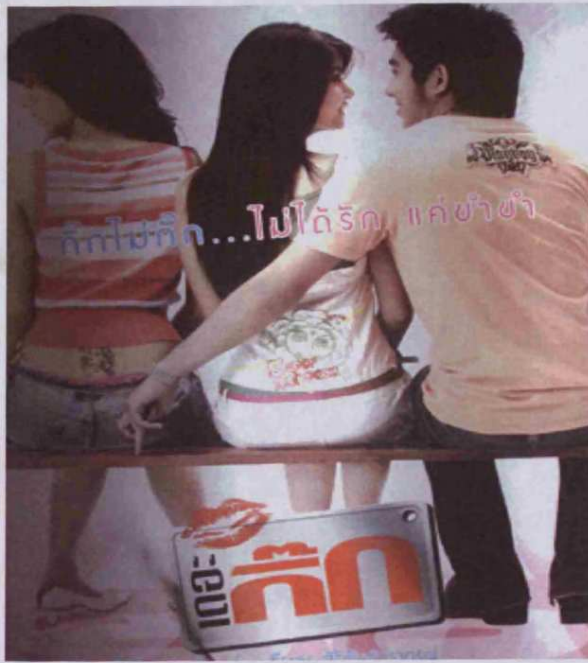
(The movie poster of The Gig)

Nowadays, *'Gig'* becomes a popular, trendy and well-known term in Thai teenager culture. *Gig* culture became a new fashion in Thai society around 2003. More specifically, a film maker has recently made a movie about Thai teenagers' lifestyles under the named of "*The Gig*" in 2006, as can be seen in the above poster. This movie indicates that the *Gig* is significant and becomes the popular fashion and culture in Thai society. This is because the *Gig* culture opens new opportunities to Thai teenagers in terms of having more freedom of courtship and sexual relationship than before. In the past, most Thai teenagers behaved themselves in good ways, as a Thai proverb notes, *Ruk Naun Sa-nguan Tua*. It means 'good' Thai women themselves should conserve their minds and gestures during the courtship; for example, they should not firstly say the word of love to men. They should not allow men to touch, to hug and to kiss them. More specifically, they should not allow men to have sex with them before wedding. This proverb mentions Thai traditional principle in teaching Thai women to follow and behave appropriately in terms of keeping their virginity until they get married. That is in contrast to the present time as I mentioned in chapter 4, Thai girls used the mobile phone as the device of expression to send their feelings via SMS. Additionally, as I observed, some of my research participants at university level cohabit with girlfriends/boyfriends during their studies.

Regarding *Gig*, nobody knows exactly who coined this term. However, my research participants told me that the word of *Gig* may be initiated by the gay group. In Thai society, the gay group is seen as risky people who had originated HIV in relation to their sexual behaviours. Afterwards, Thai teenagers adopt this term to call someone who is neither a friend nor a boyfriend and a girlfriend as a *Gig*. In another sense, a *Gig*, of which the sound is similar to a click, can be referred to a person who matches well with another in talks and tastes or in music and clothes. *Pop*, one of my research participants, expresses his ideas about *Gig* in this regard. As he notes, *when I hang out at night, I look for a Gig to date with me. Then we exchange our mobile phone numbers. Sometimes Gig's relationship can develop to be boyfriend/girlfriend's relationship later* (Pop, man 20 years old). This is related to Cherry, a 20-year-old female university student, who maintains that "*a Gig can be anyone who I like or who likes me, but this is not love* " (Cherry, girl 20 years old).

In this light, some of my research participants define the significance of *Gig* to lie at the care, the affection and the friendship. In this sense, the *Gig* relationship starts from friendship or people who have been familiar with each other before. As Pae, a 17 year old, one of my research participants expresses, *I think I fall in love with my friend because he is very nice to me. We are quite close but I am not sure how he thinks of me. Thus, I call him as my Gig at this stage.* On the other hand, Thai teenagers like to have many *Gigs* at a time in order to present themselves in such a way that they are quite popular or good looking amongst their peer group. As one of my research participants adds, *"I have two Gigs and one boyfriend"* (Fah, girl 15 years old). As Kwang, a 17 year old, one of my research participants, explains, "*Apart from having Gigs, there is another affair that involves people who like each other at first sight. They go out on a date even though they don't know the background of each other. This kind of person is called 'Zing' amongst teenagers in order to define the difference between 'Zing' and 'Gig'. For me, the Gig relationship is quite better than 'Zing'.* To clarify, the difference between Zing and Gig indicates intimacy and significance of people in the courtship among Thai teenagers. They name people in different terms to indicate the level of relationships. In this Thai context, *Zing* relationship is seen as 'like at first sight'. In another way, it can be presumed as a one night stand in the negative meaning. They might develop this relationship until they become *Gigs* which is seen to have a much more significant meaning than *Zing*.

However, Kwang's point of view presents the positive meaning of *Gig* that makes sense in teenagers' culture, in general.

Alternatively, *Gig* signifies another negative meaning that refers to a person who has an affair with many other people. Many Thai sociologists and journalists criticise *Gig* for the fact that this term has developed from the word *'Shu'* in Thai, meaning a person who has a love affair with married people. This is not a good behaviour in Thai society. Many Thai scholars argued that the meaning of the *Gig* culture is not a new one but it is a cult of love affair that has existed for a long time. In addition, several Thai sociologists (Pradtana Supapaporn 2004 and Panida Swoangseriwanich 2004) make further comments that having *Gig* is the starting point of sexual development. Despite the replacement of the word 'Shu' with *'Gig'*, the code of behaviour of a person called *'Gig'* or 'Shu' is not different. Up to this point, the *Gig* culture is interpreted by general Thai people in a serious sense that it is a way leading to having sexual relationship with many people at the same time. In this sense, a *Gig* might be called a person who has a love affair with other people by mental and physical bounding. Therefore, *'Shu'* in traditional Thai terms is now called *'Gig'*, a slang word in teenager's culture in the 21st century (Pradtana Supapaporn ibid and Panida Swoangseriwanich ibid).

Nevertheless, the meanings of *Gig* are positively interpreted by Thai teenagers in the flexible sense that *Gig* is popularly used in these days to call people whose members are in their mobile phones. Sometimes, they date with someone by way of talking through mobile phone. This is relevant to the fact that mobile phone as a linkage to create the courtship is commonly used among Thai teenagers. As Cherry, a 20 year old, one of my research participants adds, *I have two SIM cards. One is for my boyfriend; the other is for my Gig who bought this SIM card for me. Therefore, when I meet my Gig, I will use this number. This is a better way to pick up the incoming call with more comfort.* This is related to another research participant who shows that the Gig's relationship can be easily broken off like changing mobile phones. As she maintains, *I dump my Gig like I change the mobile phone. It is an easy way for a relationship. If they are not in the rules of Gig, I will find another one* (Mim, 20 years old, female university student). This finding allows me to see that Thai teenagers

treated their *Gigs* in the same way as they changed their mobile phones; in addition, the ex *Gigs* have turned to be like the rubbish mobile phones.

With a focus upon this point, my research participants demonstrate the way they behave following the rules of *Gig* during in their courtship. The rules of *Gig* can be explained in the sense that *Gig* is firstly person who is more than friend but she/he is not a girlfriend/boyfriend. Secondly, a *Gig* cannot be jealous or present his/her possessions to others. Thirdly, a *Gig* cannot check details of mobile phones of the other as they have no right to ask for opening the message box of their partners. Lastly, a *Gig* has to accept the end when another does not want to continue this relationship.

In this respect, however, in teenager's culture the word *Gig* does not merely refer to the sexual relationship. The *Gig* culture can be elaborated in my research participants' accounts in two ways. One way is to help the learning of love relationship amongst teenagers. They are learning to give love to other people. As one of my research participants added, *it is better to have someone who loves me than to have someone who hates me* (Fha, 14 years old, schoolgirl). Alternatively, it can be referred to the unstable mind of Thai teenagers who are in a condition of broken family. This may be because they try to search for the warmth or love from others. Thus, the searching for someone who loves them becomes problematic among Thai teenagers. When they are disappointed with love in particular, they start to search again and again for a substitute who can give love to them. This is similar to the use of the mobile phone to seek their identities, their pleasure and the acceptance from other friends. If they are not satisfied with the model of mobile phone, they can easily find the model that they want in the same way as they find a new *Gig*.

The explanation is that the *Gig* culture is a way to have social relations of a particular group which has been structured and shaped by a new meaning of courtship. It is also the way that those shapes are experienced, understood and interpreted in specific context. Having a *Gig*, however, cannot be judged to be exactly right or wrong; it depends on individual's behaviour. As one of my research participants puts it, *To me, having a Gig is not a big deal. Now, our society has changed. We accept the equality of people or the woman right rather than before. When men have an affair with*

someone else, it becomes normal. But if women do so, they will be blamed by the society as having the deviant behaviour (Mim, 20 years old). This account shows the inequality of genders as the mainstream in Thai traditional norm of which the people give more significance to men who have more power than women. The fact is that men who have many wives are seen as a normal issue in Thai traditional society up to present. Meanwhile, women cannot have many husbands. In the modern Thai society, Thai women resist to such Thai traditional norm in order to gain equal rights in gender issues that allow them to have more husbands. This allows me to show the connection between the changing traditional Thai values in Thai men/women and the freedom in dating of Thai girls in the new *Gig* culture which is seen as a form of resistance to Thai traditional culture.

In this regard, Thai traditional culture emphasizes that people should have one single mind and Thai ladies should behave well. In particular, the incident that married people, especially women, have an affair is not an appropriate value in traditional Thai culture. Thus, the *Gig* culture can be described as the resistance of Thai traditional culture in Thai society. Having *Gigs* signifies the new representation of Thai teenager in order to express their culture of passionate courtship in different ways. They search for a new identity and new things for their lives. Therefore, some Thai teenagers like to be *'Gigs'* rather than boyfriends or girlfriends because a *Gig* exists for a short-term relationship. As one of my research participant expressed on this regard, *I used to be someone's boyfriend before. I didn't have time to take care of her. We had many arguments when we met. Therefore, I am happy to be a Gig of someone else rather than a boyfriend. When I have no time to take care of them, they quite understand that because we are just Gigs (Bert, male 20 years old).*

The reason for this is that a person who is a *"Gig"* has freedom in love and dating with anyone with no commitment. The *Gigs* themselves can have their own boyfriends/girlfriends and at the same time they can have their *Gigs,* or vice versa. One significant rule of the *Gig* relationship is that there is no commitment for each other, unlike the boyfriend/ girlfriend relationship. Another rule of *Gig* is *Gigs* cannot express the possessive feeling in front of each other, especially in public. As my research participant expresses on this view,

I have a guy as my Gig; in the same way, I have become a Gig of someone else's. Meanwhile, I have my own boyfriend. However, having a Gig gives a good opportunity to make new friends. A Gig cannot be jealous. Being Gigs is based on friendship. It's like a rule when you are playing games. If you cannot do that, you are not a Gig anymore (Nat, 17 years old).

Although *Gig* is seen as deviant behaviour, the behaviour of having *Gigs* becomes a fashion the same as having new mobile phones. The connection here is that people can change their *Gigs* like the way they change their mobile phones due to the fashion. *Gig* relationship becomes a leisure activity amongst Thai teenagers in terms of collecting mobile phone numbers of the *Gigs* in their mobile phone handsets; it shows how cool people they are. To illuminate this point, the mobile phone facilitates *Gig* culture to expand more easily amongst Thai teenagers. They use mobile phones to decrease their feelings of missing someone, to enlarge their caring and to express their feelings. As mentioned above, a *Gig* is not a friend; he or she is more special than a friend yet he/she is not a boyfriend/girlfriend either. Therefore, he or she is defined as a kind of mysterious person that brings the temptation. As Kookai, a 17 years old girl, one of my research participants sheds light on this,

The mobile phone helped lessen my loneliness when I called my Gig. Sometimes I called the Gig more often than my boyfriend. We can talk about anything or even something that I could not talk to my boyfriend. There is no jealousy between us. Thus, what he wants to do or who he wants to date is not my business (Kookai, girl 17 years old).

Nowadays, *Gig* can be termed in different names like 'toy boy' or 'toy girl' or *Deck* (a teen or child) or 'Project'. Today, Thai teenagers prefer to give their mobile phone numbers to their *Gigs* rather than the fix-line telephone numbers. As one of my research participants notes, *I never give my home telephone number to any Gigs because I am not sure how long we will carry on. Thus, giving a mobile phone number is to play safe (Aoy, 16 years old)*. She further mentioned that when relationships break up, it is time to delete the contact of her *Gigs* from her mobile phone.

Apart from Tweens' account in *Gig*'s culture, another aspect of the *Gig* culture will be presented through Teen's accounts which shows their courtships with girls who they have just met during a night out. In this regard, most Thai teenagers are likely to spend their leisure time together in a night club or on a popular street at night that they easily get connected through mobile phones which open up their opportunities to make new friends. This issue allows me to investigate how Teen boys have social interaction through their mobile phones in relation to the modern courtship. One account of my research participants will illustrate this point.

Neng, a 21-year-old university student, studies in an evening programme of a mass communication faculty at a private university. Therefore, he always has free time in the morning until the afternoon. In Neng's gang, there are 6 people who study in the same programme. They like to spend the night life together drinking or playing snooker after class. As he notes, *in my gang, we always call each other on each day to check out where we are going at night. We gather around 4 p.m. first to have something to eat. Sometimes, if we have no programme, we would walk around in a department store before class starts in the evening.*

For them, the favorite place to hang out at night is a snooker bar or a pub. As for the pubs, Neng's gang likes to sit at Soi Tonglor in Sukhumvit area. As Neng says, on some weekdays his gang goes to a pub two times per week. However, it depends on how much money they have. Neng is quite good looking; therefore, there were many girls asking for his mobile phone number directly from him or from his friends. Neng who has no girlfriend at the moment is looking for his own girlfriend. Thus, the mobile phone is like a bridge to link him with and a new girl for the introduction stage. As Neng expressed, *sometimes, the girls call me first. The exception is, if the girl is attractive or lovely, I will call her first. To me, a voice on mobile phone is the first impression but I don't take it seriously only by the voice. There are many factors to consider who should be my girlfriend. But for being a Gig, everything is easy and is not serious.*

In night clubs, the video function of the mobile phone becomes a new tool to candid others' action, in particular amongst Neng's peer group; for example, they candid some of them throwing up the food because they are drunk. Another example is they

like to take candid shot of sexy girls at night clubs to bluff each other after that. This explains that Thai teenagers used the mobile phone technology to help them to express their power in communication in relation to who has more potential to get close to the girls than others in a peer group.

However, Teen boys' leisure activities in roaming around at night are in contrast to Teen girls' leisure activity like that of Cherry, a 21-year-old university student who has always spent her night life clubbing. As she explains it to me, *I was not a good student. I used to hang out every night before. I spent a lot of money on clubbing and paying mobile phone bills. Besides, having a cool mobile phone can express that you are a modern person. When you have a nice mobile phone, friends are likely to borrow yours to use in front of the public. The more friends you have, the more money you pay. Now, I want to be a good student. I go to university every time when I have classes.*

At the weekend, Cherry prefers to stay at her apartment with her boyfriend. Watching TV, eating, listening to music, and mobile phone chatting are leisure activities of Cherry. She likes to go shopping with friends sometimes. Her favourite shopping places are Siam Square, the *MBK shopping mall* and the Central department store. As she said, it depends on the objectives of shopping. Apart from leisure activities with friends, Cherry also likes to spend her weekend with her boyfriend. In this regard, I draw upon Cherry's account to show how she uses her mobile phone for the intimate relationship with her boyfriend and a *Gig*.

Cherry and her boyfriend use the mobile phone to call each other and to maintain their relationship; however, Cherry calls him more often than he calls her because she has a cheaper promotion. Meanwhile, her boyfriend uses the pre paid service of Dprompt. Cherry tells me personally that sometimes she calls him, but she finds he switches off his mobile phone or does not call her back for a long time. It makes her trust him less and she assumes that he might have a *Gig*. As she reflects this, the relationship with her boyfriend seems to be finished soon. This is because sometimes she has found as well that some guys like her, so she takes them as *Gigs*. However, Cherry's account demonstrates the different purposes of calling between parental contact and the courtship contact that the later is more significant for her than the former.

As a matter of fact, Cherry comes from a big family; therefore, she separates herself to live with her boyfriend at a rent apartment which is not far from her university. Thus, Cherry has more freedom than living in her home. She visits her home twice a month depending on how much money she has left. As she notes, *my family is too big. I have ten siblings. My parents are half Thai half Chinese. They are concerned about working and earning money. Besides, many people have many stories. Thus, I moved out; it is more convenient. I use the mobile phone to call them sometimes and they contact me via my mobile phone when they have a domestic business with me.*

To conclude, the *Gig* culture can be regarded as a new subculture of Thai teenagers who seek a way to express their identities in terms of showing their popularity as resistance to the dominance of Thai traditional norm. The *Gig* culture is becoming a popular culture among Thai teenagers and Thai people since calling someone as a *Gig* can denote a softer sense than calling them a boyfriend and girlfriend. In the same way, it can connote the level of relationship that they give to each other. Furthermore, it shows the courtship rituals and the uncertain commitment amongst young people in the modern culture. This has a connection with another new subculture which is called *'Deck Neaw* culture', a culture of hi-technology craze among Teens. My research will explore how Thai teenagers who are in the *Deck Neaw* culture have expressed their cool identities through the way they behave, and their preferences i.e. the way they like music and the way they have tastes for hi-technology: in this context the mobile phone.

6.2) Be my style in *Deck Neaw* Culture

Deck Neaw culture is a good illustration of a new social form of Thai teenagers in Thai contemporary society. No evidence can exactly show when the *Deck Neaw* subculture emerged in Thai society. *Deck Neaws* are young people who are crazy for high technology and associate it with their dressing styles. As I observe, it has been popular since the middle of 2003. Interestingly, the *"Deck Neaw"* culture represents the niche marketing through the dressing fashion, music, accessories, and technology in modern culture. Put in another way, *Deck Neaw* means the culture of Thai teenagers who are crazy about technological devices like computers, iPod, MP3 players, video games and high-tech mobile phones. Then, it has become the cultural

phenomenon that formulates the idea of modernity in Thai teenagers through the technology-orientated representation. As Willis (1990: 85) argues, "clothes, style and fashion have long been recognized as key elements in young people's expression, exploration and making of their own individual and collective identities".

In examining this, I argue that the ways fashions of mobile phones are associated with the construction of class and gender identities in relation to leisure lifestyle patterns indicate the modern lifestyles in Thai society. For instance, my research participants act and create their symbolic styles through the cultural consumption, in this sense the mobile phone, that have been combined with patterns of behaviour, ways of speaking and tastes in music within the *Deck Neaw* culture. Put in another way, they are engaged in symbolic forms of resistance which present the alternative and innovative fashions as well as social emulations to both dominant and parental culture. As Hebdige sees, youth culture as a form of resistance and of political consciousness rises with its specific styles of consumption of clothing and popular music (see Hebdige 1979). Based on my survey research, the non-voice services that Thai teenagers prefer to download when they have free time have been ranked. Seventy percent of ring tones downloaded are on the first rank; fifty-one percent of pictures downloaded are on the second rank, while the third rank is entertainment information, at seventeen percent. The remainders are fortune telling and business information, which are on the fourth and fifth ranks, respectively [6].

By examining this, my fieldwork experiences are drawn upon to point out how mobile phones are incorporated into Tweens and Teens' leisure lifestyles in terms of using the mobile phone to construct identities as *Deck Neaws* in their everyday lives (see Miles, 2000). Put in another way, lifestyles are symbolic meanings of artefacts: that is, what mobile phones are seen to represent over and above their manifest identity. To elaborate this point, some specific modes of mobile phones are assigned to particular styles of *Deck Neaw* by Thai teenagers.

Therefore, my main issue here is to demonstrate the interrelationship between Thai teenagers who articulate themselves as unplugged generations and technology that is inseparable in modern consumer culture. Furthermore, I am going to explore how Thai teenagers in the *Deck Neaw* culture search for their identities in terms of the

articulation of style and the freedom; and more specifically, how their lifestyles are incorporated with technology, in particular mobile phone in G2.5 and G3, to present their symbolic creativities with their co-presences through video mode and digital camera that are based on fashion, lifestyle and technology. One encounter during my fieldwork in the St. John School can express in this light.

Weaw, one of my research participants in Tween group, and her peer group of 7-8 people like to hang around and do some extracurricular activities together, for example, cheerleading or dancing. They are quite lovely and beautiful girls and that means they obtain admiration easily; therefore, many boys pay attention to her group. On the day of an interview in January 2004, I was invited to see Weaw and her friends practice dancing after school was over. Weaw put her mobile phone in front of the stand so that she could notice it easily. As she noted, *I like to dance and create choreography. Sometimes, I practice it with my sister in my room. Or sometimes, I teach my friends to dance hip hop, B-boy band, B-girl and break dance.*

As I observed, Weaw was a good dancer so maybe admiration does not come only for her beauty as she looked neat and polite. Weaw had a mobile phone strap to hang her mobile phone around her neck. Her mobile phone was decorated with colour masks and comic print that show her femininity as cute and sweet (McRobbie 1980). This allows me to reflect that the fashion brings out the sensibilities of women are adhered with the female gaze. In this sense, women view themselves from outside by influences of other friends (Fiske 1989; Ganetz 1995). The fashion of mobile phone decoration was similar to her friends. As she said, *I like to change my mobile phone decoration following the fashion of mobile phone accessories. At this moment, the mobile phone sag that looks like a baby sock is a hit. So, our gang has it* (Weaw, 14 year old). Weaw's account allows me to explain that the fashion of mobile phone decoration becomes part of her source of identity differentiating her from others.

According to the *Deck Neaw*'s lifestyles and leisure, Weaw's account can illustrate an expression of modernity in terms of using hi-technology of mobile phone in her everyday lives. To Weaw, the mobile phone has become her close friend and the modern communicative device to send MMS or SMS to friends. Also, it is a necessary communicative device for her to receive incoming calls from her dad before he picks

her up after school. Since Weaw has Nokia 3200, she thinks a mobile phone can do many more things than communication. As she expressed on this regard, "*I have the latest model at the moment. In my group, we also choose a mobile phone that has the same service of MMS system. Thus, we can receive pictures from each other. Sometimes, I like to take creative pictures or odd pictures and forward them to my friends. That's fun.*"

To get a sense of the *Deck New* culture, this culture comes from an English word "trend" or "style" which can be translated into Thai as *Neaw*, while *"Deck"* means teens or children. *"Deck Neaw"* is a slang word and a new popular word in Thai society in the 21st century. The word *"Deck Neaw"* is used to call teens or children whose ages are in the range of 12 to 24 years old. Most of them are school students or university students. Some of them are in the early stage of working (Brand Age, Magazine, 2005). The culture of *Deck Neaw* can be seen as a craze for hi-technology which Thai teenagers put on their personalities to display themselves as being cool and modern. For example, Dee, a 20-year-old university student, accepts that he is crazy about hi-technology and he is not satisfied when his technological belongings are obsolete. As he notes on this view, *I like to update myself with the modern technology. Recently, I have just changed my obsolete mobile phone to the coolest one. It is Innostream. It is a very hot mobile phone at the moment* (Dee, 20 years old).

In other words, *Deck Neaw* people perceive themselves as cool individuals. They follow the advanced technology that is in trend at the moment. Meanwhile, they adore artwork, handmade books, Indie music and they like to shoot a short movie by their mobile phones. Kookai, one of my research participants, expresses her *Deck Neaw* identities in this respect; *I like to get dressed in Deck Neaw style. I don't know why I like it. It's a kind of modern fashion, freedom and creativity. Meanwhile, I like to decorate my mobile phone with the colour strap and the pocket. It doesn't look dull when I see it.* This material is relevant to Bud, a 17 year old, one of my research participants who maintains that,

> To me, I don't like to call myself Deck Neaw but yes I am. I would like
> to dress myself in the same way as my friends do for example skinhead,

dreadlocks or Japanese style like tying my hair in the middle of my head. I cannot dress like that at the moment because I am a high school student. But I think I am another style of Deck Neaw. I am crazy about the modern technology especially the mobile phones. My mobile phone has full features for example I can record any events in my video phone. A video clip that I shoot looks like a short movie of 3 or 5 minutes. It is cool to display this experimental clip to others (Bud, male 17 years old).

Furthermore, *Deck Neaw* people establish and create their identities in a society where they can find a place or location to express the sense of self. Therefore, the *Deck Neaw* subculture seeks to express the independence in the cyber and media world that enables the creation of cultural activities like the street culture. Golf, a 17 year old, one of my research participants expresses on this view: *I like to listen to the music on the Internet for example on FAT 104.5 FM. I like this station because it plays music for Deck Neaw like Electronica, modern rock and Indie music; meanwhile, I am able to chat with friends via MSN* (Golf, 17 years old).

Up to this point, the notion of places where Thai teenagers present themselves in the *Deck Neaw* style to public, especially in the street culture, is supported by Garratt. Garratt (2004) maintains that the streets are senses of places where most of young people make themselves visible in expressing their independence from adult society. As he puts it, "this culture interacts on the streets, and finds its expression in the style it adopts. The high visibility of a group of young people with shared musical preferences, fashion ideals, and beliefs leads to the creation of a sub-culture (Garratt, ibid: 146)". That is, style has been shaped in places that are used in a gender-specific way. In Bangkok, department stores become a sense of places where Thai teenagers, especially *Deck Neaw,* are likely to roam around. For example, Thai teenagers who are fond of the *Deck Neaw* style like to hang around or hang together at Siam Square, Thanon Khao San road and Sunday Market (J.J).

Up to this point, I build up on Hall et al (1976)'s studies in explaining the *Deck Neaw* culture. In fact, *Deck Neaw* is not only a culture in which different groups of teenagers develop certain patterns and relationships, but it also reflects a variety of experiences in technology craze. To Hall, culture can be seen as a means of social

interaction and expression. This contribution enables me to explain how individuals from a particular place in the social space choose a particular style, i.e. the *Deck Neaw* style here. Furthermore, Bourdieu uses the concept of habitus to show class distinction and lifestyle practices (Reimer 1995). The notion of habitus enables me to analyse *Deck Neaw* subculture in terms of their dressing styles, their preferences and their expressions in the modern culture through Indie music that can be seen popular among Thai teenagers who like to present themselves in public places.

Examining through this subculture, my research therefore shows the consumption in the popular culture i.e. Japanese Indie music and clothing fashion as a valuable tool or resource in asserting aspects of Thai teenagers' identities that can be referred to the expression of modernity and the social interactions. This investigation is related to my argument in the sense that Thai teenagers adopt the mobile phone as part of their representations of modernity in terms of being cool and modern. To develop this argument, I will demonstrate how lifestyles and leisure patterns of my research participants in Tween and Teen's groups are correlated to the *Deak Neaw* culture by drawing upon the fashionable mobile phone as symbolic capital (Thornton 1995). One fieldwork encounter in a Japanese Indie concert with a research participant can demonstrate that Thai teenagers use mobile phones to express their *Deck Neaw* style in this light (see more details in the VCD).

In February, 2004, I went to a Japanese Indie concert with *Tai*, a schoolgirl at the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, at the Rock Pub near Siam Square. To me, *Tai* was crazy about Japanese culture; for example, she liked to get dressed like a Japanese high school student style. She liked to read Japanese comics and watch Japanese series; and she especially adored the Japanese Indie music. She could tell me about the details of famous Japanese singers who had ever toured to perform their concert in Pattaya Music Festival in Thailand. Moreover, *Tai* was one of the members of a Japanese web board who often posted her opinions about the Japanese singers that she liked. *Tai*'s lifestyle showed her related Deck Neaw style as being modern and cool in terms of using the high technology to express her feelings.

When she invited me to join this event, I did not hesitate to join this Tweens' subculture that adored Japanese music. This admiration of Japanese music was

contrast to the past because most of Thai teenagers of my age were influenced by Rock and Pop music from the USA or the UK in a popular culture. Thus, Japanese Indie music as part of a club culture among Thai teenagers that resisted the mainstream pop music was a new experience for me. We arrived at the Rock Pub only before the concert started. I observed that most of Thai teenagers came here with their partners or a big group of friends. They were fans of these bands. In fact, the concert of such Japanese Indie music was performed by Thai Indie bands [4] that produced the independent, non-traditional, innovative and empowered songs without an affiliation with any major record labels. These Thai Indie bands had several singers who could imitatively sing well with the Japanese accent and styles. I saw many Thai female teenagers get dressed similarly to each other like those of Japanese Yagusa Gang, Sailer Moon (Japanese comic) or Japanese high school students. In this sense, the Japanese dressing styles show the connections of local interactions and the image of global cultures in local setting that are represented according to the influence of music.

Surprisingly, these girls could sing these Japanese songs fluently and they expressed themselves freely with the lyrics of the songs. Not only was the dressing in Japanese styles used for expressing their identity but the various latest models of mobile phone handsets were also presented when they used mobile phones to call other friends, to exchange their mobile phone numbers and to text messages to friends as a result of the noisy music. This action brings out the fact that the mobile phone is engaged in the communicative patterns of Thai teenagers' lifestyles.

Apart from the Japanese Indie music, one symbolic feature in the Deck Neaw culture, Thai teenagers also adopt other representations of Rap and Hip hop style to express themselves as cool and independent people. These personalities show the way they think outside of the proverbial box in terms of the expression of freedom as they dare to think and act. A Thai journalist calls *Deck Neaw* subculture an Indie style in that *Deck Neaw* people are likely to seek fresh opportunities from social lives (Brand Age Magazine, 2005). This style is defined to include the following features: I-Inspire, N-Nontraditional, D-Determined, I-Innovative and E-empowered. These key words are relevant to the ideologies of *Deck Neaw* culture.

In this regard, the *Deck Neaw* culture is influenced by Indie music and underground music [5] (Brand Age Magazine 2005). In the same way, Rap, Hip hop and Dave styles are also influenced by music. In these days, Rap and Hip-hop are now used interchangeably. The lifestyle associated with Rap music is called Hip Hop. Hip hopers are likely to use a "dog tag" or label as their symbol (Danesi 2003). For Thai teenagers, dressing styles that represent their identities are significant to them as collective sensibility per se. As one of my research participant noted,

> I am a Hip Hopper but I could not get dressed like my friends because my parents are strict and serious persons. However, in my school my friends are explicitly divided into different groups like Dave, Hip hop and rap. My group is Hip Hop. The dressing style indicates who belongs to each group. We could not get dressed in Dave style and they could not get dressed the same style as ours. One of my friends moved in a new house near an area of Dave teenagers. Now she transformed her dressing style to be like Dave because they do not like her ex-hip hop style (Som Oh, 14 years old).

This account allows me to show the class habitus of Thai teenagers, in this sense each individual's habitus, which I mean here as transposable dispositions, is unique. Nevertheless, similar experiences tend to create a similar habitus and thus it is also possible to refer to a 'class habitus' (Bourdieu 1984), illuminating the lifestyles of youth in relation to their subcultures as Dave and Hip hop style. To elaborate this view, my research participant further comments that Teens who dress in Dave style are to be seen as people from lower-middle class in Thai society. They like to get dressed in tight outfits, as well as looking dirty sometimes. It is contrast to Teens who get dressed in Hip Hop style as they are seen as people who come from rich families. They wear brand name clothes and wear many accessories like leather wristbands, baseball caps and big belts. The differences between Dave and Hip hop style bring out the connections of new identity sources which are seen to be fashionable among Thai teenagers.

By the same token, *Deck Neaw* is likely to dress down to look a bit shabby like filthy street artists. The fashions of dressing style of *Deck Neaw* are second hand clothes

from western countries like the USA, the UK or Europe. Back in the 1960s and 1970s, the second hand clothes started to become a popular trend as a source for hippies, artists and others with avant-garde tastes that were restricted to older people and those with little money to spend on clothes. Later from 1980 until now, the second hand clothes have become in effect an alternative fashion statement apparently adopted and popularised by the current fashion and the high street fashion (see McRobbie 1994; Bennett 2005). The connection is made here that *Deck Neaw* are likely to get dressed in second hand clothes to show their alternative identities as resistance to the mainstream fashion.

In this sense, *Deck Neaw* style refers to the second hand clothes as a crucial medium for grounded aesthetic in which young people express and explore their own specific individual identities. Young people learn about their inner selves partly by developing their outer image through clothes. They use *Deck Neaw* style in their symbolic work to express and develop their understanding of themselves as unique persons, to indicate who they are, and who they think they are (Willis 1990:89). This allows me to connect Weaw's leisure style with mobile phone in the *Deck Neaw* culture.

At school, Waew has her favorite and private corner to listen to the music from her mobile phone during her lunch break. She also uses it to download many pictures and used the photo function to copy images of Thai female movie stars (*Aum, Patchara Chaichua or Paula Taylor*) and forward them to her friends. As she notes while showing these pictures to me, *my mobile phone can save many pictures in different files like a computer. It can record the music from the radio station as well. I like hip hop and pop dance music. Sometimes I send some songs with good meanings to cheer my friend up when she is down.*

Furthermore, *Weaw* likes to gossip other friends via her mobile phone. The reason for this is in school she does not have a chance to do so because they stick to each other all day. As she says, *"it's time to review the conversation that we talked, the jokes that we made and the nice guys that we met through the mobile phone at home. It is safer than saying something in front of people face-to-face. It will bring me a shame later"*. In this regard, Weaw's leisure lifestyle shows signs of mobile phone fever

among Tween girls in the sense that they are starting to get interested in online chat, music, guys and fashion as their leisure activities (Oksman and Rautiainen 2003).

As for *Weaw*'s leisure activities at home, she likes chatting on the MSN with her friends. After dinner, she starts chatting on the MSN or playing computer games until she goes to bed. Mostly she talks on her mobile phone with a close friend, rather than on a fix-line telephone. As she expresses, *I like to call my friend on her mobile phone because for one thing I don't know her home phone number. Instead of waiting for someone who helps call my friend to pick up the telephone, calling friends at their mobile phones straight away is better. Another thing is that, if I use my home phone to call my friends, my mum can check whose mobile phone numbers they are.*

In this regard, *Weaw*'s lifestyle demonstrates the mobile phone as a leisure toy and an intimate device which is engaged in her everyday life. This demonstration allows me to show the connections of the mobile phone as a global icon, in this sense as fashion that has interacted with local interactions. This issue can be related back to my argument in the earlier chapters in such a way that Thai teenagers serve as cultural intermediaries within the local processes of globalisation in terms of consuming global brands in local settings. In this context, my research suggests that the style of mobile phone has become part of the common vernacular of self-expression and perception (see Ewen 1990). Furthermore, the mobile phone is understood to be used as a means for the construction of a new identity among Thai teenagers as illustrated especially through clothes, music and leisure activities in *Deck Neaw* culture.

Conclusion

This chapter shows different subcultures as Tween and Teen have culturally shaped their identities which subsequently shaped different leisure and lifestyles activities in the modern culture which is described here as habitus. The ethnographic material illustrates that the mobile phone symbolizes a lifestyle and the ideal of modernity in youth culture in relation to socialisation, communication and individualisation. Thai teenagers in Bangkok find themselves in new ways of communication as they use the mobile phone in relation to the construction of new identity in modernity and new cultural spaces to mark it off as their own and imagine themselves as its inhabitants.

In this context, *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* subculture present the new form of expression that have now been integrated into Thai teenagers' lifestyles in general. The *Gig* and the *Deck Neaw* subcultures become cultural spaces where Thai teenagers freely expressed the idea of modernity by dressing, thinking, acting and using the mobile phone technology which is seen to be cool and modern among friends. In this regard, they displayed their cool identities accommodated with the model of mobile phones. This investigation allows me to look at the cool culture in school where Thai teenagers have social interaction with cool brands that express the cool selves in the next chapter.

Notes

[1] In terms of Tween and Teen's subculture, it can be defined that "a subculture is a segment of a culture that shares distinguishing patterns of behavior" (Hawkins et al., 1986). Furthermore, it can be referred to a sub-division of a national culture, composed of a combination of factorable social situations such as class status, ethic background, regional and rural or urban residence, and religious affiliation. However, this sub-division forms in their combination a functioning unity which has an integrated impact on the participating individual (Gordon 1997:41).

[2] A resistance to conformity implies that new or different social expectations are thrown up, and their maintenance relies on such resistances and expectations counteracting the mechanisms of social control (Jenks 2005:847).

[3] Gelder and Thornton (1997)'s contribution "departs more radically from CCCS paradigms, replacing their politicization of youth with an account of the micro-politics of the cluster of overlapping subcultures that British youth call 'club cultures' that could also be about habitus: it is the colloquial expression given to the British youth cultures for whom dance clubs and their offshoot, raves, are the symbolic axis and working social hub. She develops the notion of 'subcultural capital, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu (for 'distinction') and turning back to the Chicago School (for 'status') to investigate social conflicts and cultural competition within subcultures (Gelder 1997:148)." By doing so, I elaborated Thornton's work in my thesis to look at how the *Gig* and *Deck Neaw'* subcultures incorporate the meanings of styles through the commercials- symbolic capital, in this sense the Japanese Indies music.

[4] See more detail on www.festivalnet.com accessed in August 2006.

[5] Underground music is music which has developed a cult independent from their commercial success. This music, generally speaking, has little or no mainstream appeal, visibility or commercial presence. The term is also used currently to describe contemporary music of non-mainstream musical exponents with actual specific genre or style being unimportant in determining the "underground" status. The term underground music has been applied to several artistic movements, such as the

psychedelic music movement of the mid 1960s, punk rock and hardcore, hip hop and alternative rock (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/underground_music) accessed in August, 2006.

[6] The percentage of the ranking is calculated on the basis that people can select more than one option; see the appendix 2 for more details on the analysis of the survey results.

Chapter 7

Cool Culture at School

This chapter will further investigate how Tweens and Teens have developed their own values and attitudes in the youth subcultures at school, where social interaction and leisure activities centre around cool brands. In the sense, mobile phones are used to express their self-fulfilment as well as their privileges, and to access a desirable status (see Chaney 2001). This finding enables me to show that Thai teenagers have social interactions with mobile phones as one symbol of many transitions to modernity, generating the idea that cool brands explicate symbolic meanings – i.e. high technology, wealth and their actualization (see Lurry 1996; Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Halstead 2002). This demonstration will provide an understanding of a dynamic self, the symbolic meanings of mobile phones, and the role played by premium brands in the Thai context (see Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998).

In a 'brandscape', people live with brands and try to associate these brand images with their own identities (see Elliott and Wattanasuwan ibid; Kritsadarat Wattanasuwan 2000). It is elaborated in this chapter that the cool culture (as I have termed it), as a culture of brand images, carries meanings and particular forms of imagination into Thai teenagers' everyday lives (Ukritwiriya 2005). Thus, the cool culture of Tweens and Teens in schools can be understood here by describing the symbolic interaction expressed in terms of using premium brands of mobile phones, both handsets and networks to convey the cool and modern style, or *Theh* in Thai. I argue that the "culture" of brand images creates social competition and manipulation of social emulations amongst peer groups who are different depending on their school type (e.g. private and public schools). To demonstrate that this culture exists, the following section presents accounts of different forms of cool selves among Thai teenagers and the influence of peer groups, as well as the way in which fashions are used to display individuality and a sense of modern styles in order to create self-identity.

In the first section, I define cool culture as a culture of using brand names of mobile phones that subsequently presents the modernity of the user, and this is related to status and self-actualisation. This is to illustrate technological consumption of different genders in everyday life through cool brand images, especially among Thai teenagers. Using mobile phones from the six mobile phone operators namely AIS, DTAC, Orange, GSM 1800, Hutch and Thai Mobile, is regarded as cool. Yet, using AIS and DTAC is perceived as much cooler among Thai teenagers because of their effective networks and advertising representations. Additionally, premium brands of mobile phone handsets, i.e. Nokia, Motorola, Samsung and Panasonic, can be seen as a fashion statement, which Thai teenagers see as the most important factor in buying mobile phones and forming identity. In this sense, the use of cool brands can be identified as close to self–actualisation, affluence as well as trendiness, and self-confidence in peer relations. It is relevant to the cultural commodities and cultural identities that are identified, characterized and served by each style within the group through the associated design and fashion of the mobile phone (Schofield 2000).

I focus on the meanings that young people attach to these cool brands that they purchase and the ways in which young people communicate and establish shared values through tastes in fashion (Miles 1996). I will argue that cool brands are based on the production and consumption of signs that are made up of communication processes which present a 'representation' of modernity associated with Thai teenagers' self-identities within the modern lifestyle (Thompson 1995 and Kellner 1989). Two examples will be discussed in this regard: AIS and DTAC logos as symbolic resources.

The process of consumer socialisation will be discussed in this chapter. It will examine the way in which the Tween and Teen subcultures in schools have mediated the conspicuous consumption, which is cultivated by social norms and values, through using and talking about mobile phones, and also shopping behaviours, which are distinguished by brand preference and taste (Gunter and Furnham 1998). The cool mobile phone brand can be used to maintain their prestige which I have been discussed in previous chapters. Thus, this chapter aims to discuss the fact that brand images are problematic amongst Thai middle-class teenagers. The problems lie in choosing premium brands of mobile phone, mainly between AIS and DTAC,

differentiating cool handsets, and creating cool selves in the light of peer group references and the imagination of self-identity.

The connections between mobile phone experiences and stories about talking on mobile phones will be provided in the second section to illustrate the way Thai teenagers gossip on mobile phone to seek pleasure. On the other hand, talking on the mobile phone can be regarded as a replacement of other leisure outdoor activities at school. These activities can illustrate the distinction of leisure activities by gender. My observation will demonstrate these social interactions of Thai teenagers with cool brands through public talks in order to display personal identities and relate to intimate talks in terms of sex and gossip issues on mobile phones. These interactions illustrate the core values, i.e. admiring wealth, jealousy and greed, of Thai teenagers towards premium brands in terms of lifestyle changes in modern culture. This issue is central and will be explored in the second section.

7.1) Why cool brands express the cool self

This section explores the notion that the mobile phone as a symbol of modernity has become an important part of Thai teenagers' self-formations. By examining this, my contribution relating to those of various scholars shows the relationship between cool brands and cultural consumption. In this sense the mobile phone helps construct self identity in the modern culture. As Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2004:8) outlined, "the brand is the initial system of consumption, the medium for guarantee between the consumer and the producers". To reiterate, in a 'brandscape', people live with brands and try to associate these brand images with their selves. For Thai teenagers, the world of cool mobile phone brands is foremost among the "signals" of comoditites that they encounter everyday (see Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998; Kritsadarat Wattanasuwan 2000). With regard to these literatures, this section will pinpoint how the notion of premium brand identity is relevant to the modern self-identity in a different way.

To focus upon this point, it is necessary to understand how Thai teenagers express brand personalities in terms of symbolic meanings, i.e. being modern, stylish and high-tech, that are relevant to their selves in various ways. The fact is that the

perception of brand personality can be influenced by the active audiences (Sentis and Markus 1986; De Mooij 2004). In using cool brands, my research displays that Thai teenagers buy premium brands of mobile phone handsets, i.e. Nokia, Motorola, Samsung and Panasonic, because these cool brands are perceived as similar to their selves and their imaginations in terms of success and being modern, smart and friendly. My observations exemplifying the symbolic meanings of the Nokia brand as luxury and a durable technology were articulated by a Teen boy, *Champ*, a 21-year-old male university student. *I like Nokia even though some models are expensive, because it is durable. Even when it has been dropped many times and parts have come off it, incredibly, it still works. It suits me because I am not a delicate and sensitive person* (Champ, male, 21 years old).

This expression is related to another account of *Neng*, a 21-year-old male university student, who reported Nokia to be the popular brand among his friends. As he added, *I like the technology of Nokia because it is easy and friendly to operate and worthwhile to use. I am familiar with Nokia functions and all the buttons. I think Nokia is easier to use than other brands. My friends always use Nokia. It is a popular mobile phone handset and it is acceptable in the second-hand market; therefore I bought it* (Neng, male, 21 years old). This material allows me to demonstrate the interpretations of symbolic meanings relating to mobile phones, which are integral features of the expression of Thai teenagers' identities and of their perceptions of the identities of others (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981; Dittmar 1992).

The popularity of Nokia brand among my research participants can be supported by my survey research, which revealed that forty-one per cent of my research correspondents like to use Nokia, fifteen per cent use Motorola and nine per cent use Samsung, while the remaining thirty per cent use various brands, i.e. Sony Ericsson, Sanyo, Panasonic, Siemens, I-mobile, Alcatel and Kyocera. One reason is that Thai teenagers like to use the same model as that of their group of friends because they have found different brands to be incompatible in terms of sending text messages based on such non-voice services as SMS and MMS. *Bert*, a 20-year-old male university student, who turned to using a Nokia handset instead of a Siemens brand, expressed this view.

I used to buy Siemens C 25, Siemens M 35 and Siemens SL 45. At that time, I liked Siemens's handsets because they were of luxurious technology, slim and small. However, I changed and use Nokia now because most of my friends use Nokia. Also, when I sent text messages from Siemens to any handset, those messages were incompatible. So, for example, my friends who used Nokia could not understand them (Bert, male, 20 years old).

Apart from the Nokia brand, at this moment, the Samsung brand is becoming more popular among Thai teenagers, especially the Tween group, because it is seen as equipped with exciting multimedia technology and cool style that matches their style. *Bin*, a-14-year-old schoolboy, one of my research participants, said in this regard, *I like the Samsung handset. I like its hi–technology, multimedia and cool communicative devices. I like to use it because it is relevant to my style. And I think Nokia technology is not exciting and it is for the adults rather than young Teens* (Bin, male, 14 years old).

According to these interviews, these fashionable mobile phones have brought about a sense of personal association with brand images and brand personalities. For instance, the perception among Thai teenagers of the Nokia brand is associated with modern technology, modernity, durability and high prices. Siemens handsets can be understood as luxurious, slim and using miniature technology. Meanwhile, the Samsung brand could signify multimedia communication, and is seen as cool and fashionable according to the Tween group. At this point, I will provide one encounter with my research participants at their school to demonstrate why they use cool brands to relate to self-identity.

One day at lunchtime in the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, I was interviewing my research participant *Aoy*, a 14-year-old girl. *Aoy* was introduced to me by Vee, Mo and Golf, who were her seniors. *Aoy*, a cute and cheerful girl, was perceived as famous amongst her seniors and her peers because she was cast as a presenter of an advertisement for the Nokia 3300. Thus, she had become a popular girl in school and many students knew her from the advertisement in magazines.

Thus, the model or brand of mobile phone she chose had become an interesting issue for Golf, a mobile expert. During the interview, Golf stood nearby so that he could listen in. He interrupted my interview when *Aoy* showed me her mobile phone, a Panasonic JD 55, saying, *"Hey, when did you change your mobile phone? If I remember correctly, your old mobile phone was a Nokia 8850."* Aoy replied, *"Yes, now I use a Panasonic JD 55. I like it because it's quite small and I can easily keep it in my pocket. It also has a hands-free function. Besides, my grandmother who paid for it likes this model, too."* When *Golf* heard that, he said, *"Well...well...it's ok and it suits a pretty girl like you. The pink handset with the Kitty decoration is very... very sweet".* Aoy replied, sounding a bit angry, *"I don't like that Nokia Engage of yours; it's odd and clumsy, like half a watermelon. Besides, I would feel uncomfortable if I received phone calls by attaching half a watermelon to my ear. I don't think it's Theh (cool)"*

In this regard, the above account shows the connection between self-images and social interaction in the sense that "brands are significant symbolic resources that facilitate social interactions" (Kritsadarat Wattanasuwan 2000:100). As can be seen, Thai teenagers like *Aoy* and *Golf* are associated with the model of mobile phone they own and have mediated their social interactions differently in terms of being cool and modern. To elaborate, *Aoy* and *Golf* talk about brands and they exploit symbolic meanings of brands to present the self. For example, *Golf* employs his Nokia Engage to express himself as a cool and high-tech person in various social contexts. As *Golf* further argued to *Aoy*, he can listen to music with the MP3 function and play games on his mobile phone while he is travelling home, the functions of which *Aoy's* mobile phone does not have.

The arguments between *Aoy* and *Golf* reveal that the symbolic consumption of brands can help establish and convey some of the fundamental cultural categories such as social status, gender, age, and such cultural values as family, tradition and authenticity (McCracken 1993). These concepts are used here to analyse the way in which *Golf* shows his "authenticity" according to his expert criticism of *Aoy*'s mobile phone. For him, Nokia Engage is associated with his personality, a high-tech, trendy and cool person; meanwhile, he regards the Panasonic JD 55 as feminine technology regarding the pink and small size. Its technology is also seen as lower than that of his mobile

phone. On the other hand, *Aoy* regards her Panasonic JD 55 as slim and compact. This model satisfies her and her grandmother's needs in terms of utility, which shows family values.

This point is relevant to my survey research, which revealed that more than sixty percent of the research correspondents agreed with the statement *Brand name is an important factor in buying a mobile phone*. That is, these mobile phone brand names offer different kinds of mobile phone functions or innovations to serve Thai teenagers' various lifestyles. Therefore, some of them use mobile phones as a means to express and represent their personal styles and tastes. In my survey, almost fifty per cent of the research correspondents agreed with the sentence *I buy a mobile phone because it matches my personality*.

This sentence can also be explicated by the case of *Fha*, a 14-year-old schoolgirl, one of my research participants, who buys mobile phones to match her style as a high-technology person. That is to say, the appearance of the mobile phone expresses a sense of belonging to a certain group or to accentuate the individual style of the user (Oksman and Rautiainen 2003:106). *My Nokia 7210 is okay but it is getting old. I would like a new mobile phone like the Samsung E 700, with a multi-shot digital camera. However, my new mobile phone, will have, for example, MP3, video, digital camera and multi-colour screen; I want it to present my style as a high-technology person to friends* (Fha, 14-year-old, girl). In this regard, the high-technology style of a mobile phone also gives a feeling of excitement to *Bin*, a 14-year-old schoolboy. He added, My *Samsung E 710 has been developed or upgraded from the E 700 model. It has more exciting functions, which made me excited about the mobile phone for a while* (Bin, 14 years old, boy).

Developing upon this point, these meanings of mobile phones are inseparable from the representational practices of Thai teenagers in the sense that they communicate and establish shared values through tastes in fashion. My research displayed that Thai teenagers are concerned with sociability and affection, which are key reasons and are associated with the brand images of mobile phone handsets and networks, as well as the social emulation of peer groups. In other words, my research participants have adopted mobile phones as intimate communicative devices among friends in keeping

social contacts. This finding is slightly different from those of various studies that have shown that sociability and affection are secondary factors in the adoption process. On the other hand, previous studies show that the immediate and instrumental components are significant reasons for young people's acceptance of mobile phones, particularly in Singapore and Australia (Tjong, Weber and Sternberg 2003)[1].

In line with this finding, my research additionally suggests that gender is also a significant factor in the choice of a mobile phone; choosing cool brands of mobile phones is relevant to the styles of owners that are presented at school. To exemplify this point, I shall shift to explain the significance of gender in making a buying decision as well as the buying behaviours at a department store. My observations in the *MBK* shopping mall with a salesman who worked in the mobile phone shop can support such a point that Tween boys are more likely to adopt or own high-tech mobile phones than are Tween girls. The interview is provide by *Note*, a 21- year-old salesman of one mobile phone shop, who noted, *from my experience, Teen girls consider the beauty of technology, such as shape, i.e. slim, compact, and colour like bright colour. Meanwhile, Tween boys like the high technology of mobile phones with the various gimmicks and functions. It brings about excitement for them. And Teen girls wait for the price to go down a bit because they change mobile phone more often than Teen boys do.* This finding is related to my survey research according to the statistics revealing that the ratio of having and having not camera of girls is 37.5 percent. Meanwhile, the ratio of having and having not digital camera of boys is 21.8 percent. This significant percentage indicates that boys have higher technology of mobile phone than girls have [2]. This material is related to my argument in the sense that gender is a significant factor indicating tastes and preferences in terms of choosing cool brands that match their styles.

This statement allows me to show the account of Tween boy in the sense that the hi-tech mobile phone is a big issue in daily conversation amongst friends at school. To be seen as a techno-man or mobile-man bestows a quality of being 'cool', 'trendy' and 'savvy' amongst peers. In other public places, they wish people to see them as being cool and modern that is associated with richness and good tastes, as noted in

chapter 2. Styles of interaction and self-displays of clothes or mobile phones are significant to Thai teenagers at school. As can be seen, a Tween boy who owns the latest mobile phone is seen as a popular person by a Tween girl, as stated by *Kwang*, a 14-year-old schoolgirl.

> *Amongst our friends, if we have someone who has got a hi-technology mobile phone, he or she will be well known at that time. It's like a fashion and this issue will become a talk of the town. For example, Bank has got the most expensive Nokia handset in the school. He looks cool and savvy. He studies in the senior class, M3 (Muthayom Suksa Sam), and he is older than me, but everyone knows him, even the teachers* (Kwang, girl, 14 years old).

This evidence suggests that Thai teenagers have a personal relationship with the technology and may see it in an emotional and self-extensive way (Katz, Aakhus, Hyo Dong Kim and Turner 2003).To connect these ideas, my material will provide an account of why cool brands express different cool selves alongside the mobile phone consumption patterns in Tweens' and Teens' subcultures to show how these interrelationships are significant factors in choosing cool brands. By examining this issue, my observations in both schools, the St. John's School and the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, are grounded to show that members of the Tween subculture, especially boys, are potentially more likely to buy expensive hi-tech brands associated with the brand images of mobile phone handsets than are Teen boys. I found Teen boys in my study, who are concerned about the worth of mobile phone use in terms of price and high technology, are more mature; in this sense they grow up and have responsibility to maintain mobile phones, as noted in chapter 4, than Tween boys. Therefore, the relationship between youth cultural products and branding in terms of the construction of identity, which may vary according to the type of school, will be investigated. In doing so, my encounter in St. John's School, a private school, and Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun, a public school, will highlight this issue.

Different Kinds of Coolness in Public and Private Schools

In this subsection, my ethnographic material will show the differences in cool selves, called *Theh* in a local Thai term, regarding premium brand uses, handsets and networks, according to the types of school that Thai teenagers attend. By examining these points, I will firstly illustrate different environments between two schools related to the social status by teasing out how Thai teenagers in both schools have experienced high-tech mobile phone use in expressing their own identity as cool and modern. I will then show the connections between social interaction vis-à-vis mobile phones within the school gang and the distinction of cool culture. The focus in this regard is using premium mobile phones as a means to express achievement and desirable status, and the social emulation of Thai teenagers in public and private schools.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, the significance of school type can be linked to the class distinction of Thai teenagers. In brief, students who study at private school, such as the St. John's School, are perceived as rich or upper middle-class people. Meanwhile, students who study at public schools, such as the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, are perceived as median middle class or lower middle class. To exemplify this point, I will discuss these issues in relation to the different environments of the schools, i.e. classroom, school activities and school facilities during the observation of my research participants in the St. John's School and the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School.

Every morning at the St. John's School, a private Christian school, Tabb and his group of friends always have an appointment to have breakfast at the school canteen where they can choose various kinds of meals from, i.e. Western, Indian or Thai food. Sometimes, Tabb sends text messages to arrange a new appointment in advance. At 8 a.m., Tabb and his friends have to sing the Thai national anthem and pray in front of their classrooms inside the building. Tabb said to me that this arrangement is convenient and saves time in terms of not standing in the sun for a long time. After that, they and their 25 classmates study in an air-conditioned classroom. Each day, they always attend an English lab and computer lab to practise their skills. At

lunchtime, they have lunch together at the canteen building, buying food and beverage coupons like in the food centre of a department store.

After lunch, they sometimes separate to do their own leisure activities, such as chatting about the latest mobile phone technology, gossiping on such issues as fashion, superstars or soap operas with friends, or going to the computer lab or the library. They are likely to do a selection of extracurricular activities of many clubs after school, such as the signing club, the chess club and the acting club, which are located in special rooms for these private activities. Tabb's gang consists of 6-7 people who have studied together since primary school. Thus, they are quite close friends and they have similar tastes when choosing and buying premium brands and following fashion. As Tabb noted, *I feel frustrated when my mobile phone is out of fashion. Sometimes, one of us bought a trendy mobile phone, so other friends want to change, following him.* My observation of Tabb's group shows that the influence of social emulation is significant in Tabb's group of friends in terms of using the high-tech features of mobile phones, such as the digital camera, video phone and Internet phone. Thus, Thai teenagers in private schools employ more conspicuous consumption by using premium mobile phone brands to present themselves as being modern than do Thai teenagers in pubic schools where few have an experience of using high-tech mobile phones.

To compare the above with the environment of the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, a unisex public school, my research participants, Mo, Vee and Golf usually have breakfast at home and sometimes bring some food to eat at school together. They normally gather around the PR room, because Mo is a teacher's assistant for PR tasks, before going to sing the Thai national anthem in the football field. Vee said to me that he would like to sing the anthem and pray in front of his classroom rather than in the football field, like at private schools, because it is hot and they have to walk a long distance from the football field to his classroom on the fourth floor. Furthermore, they are not allowed to use the lift in the morning: it is reserved for teachers. In their classrooms, which have no air conditioning, there are fifty students attending the classes. Furthermore, they sometimes have to change to other classrooms located in another building to congregate with a large number of students.

My research participants here attend an English lab twice a week. For the computer lab, they have to book in advance individually to use it. At lunchtime, different time intervals are allocated for students of the junior and senior secondary levels separately to prevent the canteen from being overcrowded due to limited seating. At the canteen, my research participants buy local Thai foods such as rice and curry, rice soup and noodles, with cash. All students have one hour for their lunch breaks and leisure activities. Generally, I see some students playing plastic footballs and volleyballs in the field. Other students queue at the public telephone booths, seven of which are available at the school, to make personal calls. When school is over, students who attend some extracurricular clubs have to use the free space under the main building to arrange them. However, my research participants are likely to hang around at the *Mall Bangkapi*, a department store near their school, to window-shop at mobile phone shops or any displays of mobile phone accessories.

These accounts above show the comparison between the environments in private and public schools with respect to the lifestyles of students, which indicate their social status. In this context, the lifestyles of students in the private school are perceived as better and more luxurious than those of students in the public school, where school facilities are limited. This finding allows me to further demonstrate the connections of the school environment with respect to school activities and differences in social interactions around premium brands of mobile phone handsets. Particularly at St. John's School, I observed that the mobile phones here are more fashionable than those at the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School which can reflect social status, especially in Tabb's group. At St. John's School, more than half of the schoolboys and schoolgirls who own various premium brands carry their mobile phones visibly in their hands and in their pockets, and ubiquitously talk on their mobile phones during other activities, such as while eating in the canteen, queuing to buy food coupons and going to buy food. They are visibly displaying their cool selves even while eating!

Young people in this school not only present their mobile phones to the public but also express their styles through their accessories, such as luxurious watches, and brand-name wallets and bags, which were used to signify their wealth and social status. As Halstead puts it, "wearing brands can become part of a 'coercive ritual' of belonging for young people" (see Halstead 2002:288). Furthermore, the students

always mention their family activities, such as studying abroad and long holidays abroad in places like Europe and America. This interaction can be used to illustrate social values in Thai society, where people are likely to admire the wealth of others and are likely to show off their affluence. One encounter during my fieldwork, as detailed below, shows that expressively wealthy students become 'teachers' pets'.

One morning, while Tabb and his friends were waiting to give food for the monk, his teacher, who Tabb called *Kru Nim,* came to feed the monk as well. While they were waiting for the monk to arrive, *Kru Nim* saw Tabb playing with his mobile phone. She was interested in Tabb's model and asked about the price and functions because she had not seen other students holding the model like Tabb did. After that, she asked him if she could call a teacher using his phone, despite having a mobile phone handset herself from which she could make the call. She perhaps wanted to make use of a popular means of communication. She then asked Tabb and his friends about the cultural studies programme in Japan in that coming summer. Several questions led to a comparison of their social status, for example their parents' occupations, their leisure activities at home and their mobile phone preferences. After she had left, one of Tabb's friends gossiped that Tabb had become a teacher's pet because he was good at studying and had the coolest mobile phone, which signified wealth. A Sony Ericsson P 800 can be used to access the Internet, like with a PC, to download movies to preview and to store huge picture files, all of which are seen as cooler functions than those on Tabb's friends' phones. Furthermore, the Sony Ericsson P 800 looks superior to the handsets owned by Tabb's group of friends because it is popularly used by businessmen because of its high price and high technology. Moreover, other friends of Tabb also use fashionable mobile phones with digital cameras, karaoke phones and video phones, the functions of which are seen as not being special.

This situation is slightly different from that of my research participants at the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, who have little experience of hi-technology using premium brands. My observations show that students are more likely to play with someone else's high technology mobile phone because some of them do not have mobile phones or have mobile phone with ordinary functions. As can be seen, few students from the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School display their cool brands explicitly at school. Most of their choices and desires for cool mobile phone brands

depend on the moral economy of their households, as I noted in chapter 5. Vee, one of my research participants, expressed in this light why he still carried an ordinary mobile phone, *my father did not allow me to buy a fashionable mobile phone. He said a new mobile phone is not necessary at this moment; it is just used for calling and receiving calls. We have more significant things to buy than mobile phones* (Vee, a 17-year-old schoolboy).

This is a different finding from that of the interviews with my research participants in St. John's School, which reveal that they change their mobile phones more often than do students in the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, at an average of once a year, and sometimes every six months. As *Tabb* and his friends say, *The Sony Ericsson P 800 is the fifth handset for me since I started to use mobile phones two years ago. Binn is on his fourth handset and so is Tarr. Normally, we change handset once per year or less than that on average* (Tabb, a 14-year-old schoolboy).

At the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, some students have cool brands of mobile phones and some prefer to buy second-hand cool brands rather than new ones, which are more expensive. Some do not have mobile phones and have to stand in line at the public telephone booth for a long time to make calls at lunchtime. These students are likely to borrow cool mobile phones from their friends to make calls as if they belong to them. Sometimes, they borrow mobile phones to play games all day and forget to return. Thus, young people who have the coolest mobile phones become popular amongst their friends, especially students like *Golf* who come from a rich family. As he states on this issue, "*My mobile phone is now being borrowed by one of my close friends. He wanted to play a popular game on my mobile phone. It's normally like this. Students who have cool mobile phone brands with special functions will be victims of pleasure*" (Golf, 17 years old). In this regard, the cool and modern identities of students in the public school in relation to using the premium brands that can be lent out to friends in the group or being an owner of such brands are served as self-fulfilment and privileges. Put more simply, a cool identity can be used as a marker for group membership.

The gang members have an influence on the gang's identity as everyone uses the same model or an equivalent cool model. As I observed in both schools, Thai

teenagers are likely to gather in big gangs consisting of more than six people of the same sex. However, mixed-sex groups are rare, especially at St. John's School because St. John's School is divided into a boys' school and a girls' school. Thus, the distinctions in mobile phone technology by gender are easy to see. For example, boys' groups are likely to own hi-technology, cool mobile phones with exciting functions such as the Internet access, a digital organizer and a video recorder, which are in fashion at the moment. Meanwhile, girls' groups are likely to have beautiful, small and luxurious mobile phones. The issue of whether or not their mobile phones are hi-tech matters less to the girls.

In this regard, my research suggests that mobile phone technology is able to convey feelings and attitudes in personalising technology and to portray a sense of being cool to the opposite sex in school. In this context, Thai teenagers become producers as well as consumers, using mobile phones for their own inventive purposes. For example, they compose music or download ring tones to match their preferences. To demonstrate the symbolic work at play in Thai teenagers' everyday activities (see Willis 1990), I shall take my observation of Waew, a girl at St. John's School, and her gang (this term means here as a group of close friends).

At lunchtime when I visited St. John's School, I saw Weaw and her gang, which was composed of around eight people. This was a relatively big group when compared to other groups. They were dressed in student uniforms and held their beautiful mobile phones in their hands. Some of them had the latest Nokia and Samsung mobile phones. Furthermore, they decorated their mobile phones with similar styles of illuminated antennas, baby socks and colour straps. They were likely to be involved in the same activities: for example, they joined the same clubs, the cheerleaders' club and the singing club. Furthermore, they had the same favourite restaurant and beverage shop from which to buy food and drinks. After lunch, they were likely to hang around under the activity building in front of the basketball field, some of them talking on mobile phones and some chatting with their boyfriends.

While chatting, I noticed that one girl of this group asked a boy in another group, who was using the latest Motorola mobile phone, to help her to operate her mobile phone. They then exchanged mobile phones to download special ring tones and wallpapers.

After that, I heard them talking about the premium mobile phone brands they used in terms of appearances and functions, in particular how to compose a ring tone. Afterwards, the boy sent a ring tone to the girl. The meaning of the song was all about falling in love and courtship. This account provides an understanding of how a cool identity in relation to premium brand mobile phones can build up links and social interactions between Thai teenagers at school. In this context, students who use premium brands can draw the attention of friends concerning the way in which they are seen as cool and modern people in relation to their mobile phones.

In coordinating the everyday lives of Thai teenagers in both schools, mobile phones are not only inserted into activities outside the classroom, but are also used in activities inside the classroom. Even though mobile phones are not allowed in class, Thai teenagers have various ways to break this rule. The issue of using mobile phones in the classroom was brought up by *Ton*, a 17-year-old schoolboy in the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School. As he put it, *I always use the vibration function to receive incoming calls. Thus, my teacher at the front of the room does not know. However, teachers have prohibited mobile phone use in classrooms among students; it is not fair because teachers can use them* (Ton, 17-year-old boy, The Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School).

However, this behaviour which is contrary to the rules can be seen as a cool action amongst Thai teenagers to show their self-identity to their friends. As one of my research participants in St. John's School expressed, *my mobile phone provides various ring tones for me in order to choose which ring tones are suitable in the class. I choose the lowest noise and the insect ring tone. It's cool when the teacher does not know what the noise is or where it comes from* (Binn, 14-year-old boy, St. John's School).

Differences in coolness of mobile phone networks

As noted, peer group influences in terms of gaining experience of high-technology mobile phone use is a significant factor that indicates the culture of using cool brands at school. A further connection can be made between cool brands of handsets and networks in terms of the process of customer socialization. In this regard, the connection will show that Thai teenagers learn about values, norms and expected behaviour patterns from their peer groups in school. By choosing AIS and DTAC

mobile phone networks over others such as Orange, Hutch and Thai Mobile, Thai teenagers are trying to construct their own social belonging to a group sharing certain values or reference points.

My research displays that Thai teenagers perceive AIS as a first-class network, which has a highly effective coverage area and good quality service in non-voice service data. Meanwhile, DTAC is seen as a worthwhile network due to its charging of per-second rate, which has made customers happy to pay less. Orange is perceived as the friendly network, and provides various promotions according to the type of connection. For example, five close people on the same network are able to call each other at a very low price. This promotion enhances relationships between people to bring them closer in the modern culture. Hutch is seen as the multimedia service network, and has launched trendy picture and Internet facilities within its "buy one get one free" campaign, but the signal coverage is limited in urban areas. Lastly, Thai Mobile is perceived as having cheap rates in both its prepaid and post-paid service, but it does not provide nationwide signal coverage. Even in some areas of Bangkok, i.e. in a lift or a basement, no signal can be obtained.

From this review of networks, the well-known social connotations of mobile phone networks become the place where young people arrange closed group territories for brands, and where these groups share similar values and mobile phone preferences (Claire Lobet-Maris 2003). As Michman et al. (2003:130) maintains, "Young people like to belong and reference groups serve as an important frame of reference for individuals in their purchasing decisions. The norms and standards of the reference group are used as a guide for the individual in developing their own behaviour patterns." By examining this issue, on the other hand, my material brings out the tensions among peer groups as being reference groups to provide a means of social comparison and a motivating force in particular in choosing the cool mobile phone networks, AIS and DTAC[3]. One encounter during my fieldwork demonstrates this issue.

While eating snacks after school with *Tabb* and his peer group, I saw *Binn* trying to send an MMS to another friend, but it seemed he failed many times. Tabb asked *Binn* which network he was using, and *Binn* said it was DTAC. Then, *Tabb* offered *Binn* to

use his AIS network to send the MMS instead. He said, *"Hey... maybe your network has no signal around this area. I can lend you my network; it's a stronger signal."* Binn argued that *"normally my network is effective in every area; maybe the network receiver does not support non-voice service data."* *Tabb* further said, "I think you had better change your network to AIS." *Tabb* said he was confident in his AIS network as the premium network. However, *Binn* said *"I would do but it has a very expensive calling rate."*

This account enables me to focus on the symbolic aspects of brand images and choices to bring out the ways Thai teenagers interpret the meanings of cool mobile phone networks, in this context AIS and DTAC, through the visual signs and images of logos and slogans that map out their values and attitudes. My data brings out how my research participants employ mobile phones as symbolic resources for constructing self-identity from advertisements to make sense of the brands advertised and subsequently incorporate their meanings into their symbolic projection of the self [4] (Kitsadarat Wattanasuwan 2000). I will illustrate this point using the logo and slogan of AIS and the 1-2-call network, and secondly the logo and slogan of DTAC and the Happy Dprompt, as presented below.

Anytime Anywhere Everyone **AIS**

Source: www.ais.co.th

The slogan of AIS is *"Tuk Thee Tuk Vela"*, which can be translated into 'anytime anywhere everyone', implying an efficient mobile phone network that covers all areas and is available for communication at any time. To further consider the colour and style of the AIS logo, the blue signifies the sky, which suggests communication processes through the sky, such as a satellite dish. Moreover, the image also resembles Saturn and thus denotes a large planet in the solar system. It can be

connoted that AIS is the largest communication corporation in Thailand and provides many telecommunication and mobile phone services. Furthermore, AIS, a post-paid service, has positioned itself as a premium product with a high quality of signal coverage with high calling rates.

The logo of AIS's pre-paid service, *1-2-Call*, launched in the Thai mobile phone market in 1999, is seen as cool by Thai teenagers because the slogan of freedom reflects the modern lifestyles of Thai teenagers, incorporating mobile phones into their everyday lives. They will have more freedom than the post-paid service as they can limit their expenses by using top-up cards. Furthermore, the colours and symbols used in the *1-2-Call* logo, which has three circles connected together and the use of such bright colours as red, green, dark blue and yellow, are eye-catching to attract the attention of Thai teenagers. It seems to me that these colours can be seen to signify vivid lifestyles and freedom of communication. *Tee*, one of my focus group participants, demonstrates that the *1-2-Call* logo has a strong impact in terms of creativity. As he puts it, *The three coloured circles signify to the power of the signal that can enter to any space, and the slogan states freedom. I also like its advertisements that encourage Thai teenagers not to fear but to dare to brave the world* (Tee, a 21-year-old, male university student).

This examination of the AIS and *1-2-Call* logos reveals how Thai teenagers interpret these signs associated with brand images by relating them to familiar systems of conventions: the framework of meaning created by communication within the culture

(Chandler 2002). This issue was discussed with my focus group participants, whose comments shed light on how Thai teenagers use these brand images and match them to their personalities. The issue of freedom is brought out by Dee who notes that *I like the 1 2 Call logo. It is cool: I see it at the end of TV commercials when each circle is made to expand and contract like a heartbeat. What's more, I like its slogan 'freedom' as it matches the personality of teenagers in the modern culture, like me* (Dee, male, 20 years old). Another comment about the AIS network is provided by *Dol*, a 20-year-old, who adds that the clear signal and high technology have become prominent reasons to choose the AIS network.

> *I like the clear signal and the coverage of all areas of AIS because my parents live up-country. I need efficient communication to contact them. I like the high technology. Even though the AIS service is seen as more expensive than others, I think I am willing to pay for it to get a better service* (Dol, female, 20 years old).

Meanwhile, the slogan of DTAC is "*Ruang Ngai Sum Rub Khun*", which can be translated into "DTAC makes it easy". The DTAC network can be understood as an accessible network, conveying the sense that mobile phones are now available to anyone, and are never inaccessible. The blue words of *DTAC makes it easy* are framed in the shape of a SIM card, forming a simple logo. DTAC, as the foremost rival of AIS, provides another choice of mobile phone network; for example, the calling rate is seen as cheaper and call times are calculated by the second. Although some rural areas may not have DTAC coverage, its other strong points can beat AIS in the city. This network is perceived by my research participants as a sincere and friendly network for Thai society in terms of not making excessive profits from calling rates. Ton, a 17-year-old schoolboy, tells me about his experiences with the DTAC network. *Although the signal of DTAC is not strong, they will return money to you when you could not make a call in the no signal area.* This is relevant to Bird, a 17-year-old, who confirmed that the DTAC signal was not a problem when he was in a remote area.

DTAC
makes it easy

Happy

Happy

Happy
Dprompt

Happy
Dprompt
ความสุขพร้อมเดน

(Source: www.dtac.co.th)

Under the 'Happy' campaign, DTAC launched a promotional package that was designed to make customers 'happy' when they used it. Most Thai teenagers use the happy SIM card because they think these can help them to save money for other expenses. For this reason, DTAC calculates its calling charge per second, which makes people happier than with other networks. This is related to the social values of Thai people, as reflected in the saying, *Jai Pang Kwa Tam Mai*, which means "why pay more if there are good things at a reasonable price?" Furthermore, the word "happy" in black and the red line can signify a person smiling while using this post-paid service. Furthermore, the term "Happy Dprompt" suggests the action of being ready to use and bringing happiness. In accord with this idea, my research participants feel more comfortable using this network rather than others. The issue of saving more money and making them happy is supported by *Nid*, a 17-year-old schoolgirl, who says, *I don't care about clear signals. I care about the money in my pocket. I don't like to use the AIS service. I think it exploits people. They count the calling rate per minute. Supposing that I make a call that lasts one minute and one second, they would count that as two minutes* (Nid, girl, 17 years old).

Furthermore, the use of the Happy Dprompt has brought about brand imagination in my research participants in terms of hearing the jingle. This point is elaborated by *Bud*, one of my research participants in the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, who notes, *I like the advertising campaign of the Happy Dprompt: they have a jingle similar to that of one of the ice cream brands. When I hear this music, I think about two things: ice cream and mobile phones. When I eat ice cream, I feel happy. In the same way, when I use my mobile phone, I feel happy as well* (Bud, boy, 17 years old).

In this regard, Thai teenagers who adopt AIS and DTAC associate the brand images with their strongest points, namely the efficient network and the happy network, respectively, and also match these qualities to their personalities, i.e. self-confident and successful, as well as friendly and economical. The connections of these interpretations of AIS and DTAC vis-à-vis Thai teenagers' social interactions enable me to provide an understanding of the significance of cool mobile phones. The ways Thai teenagers incorporate mobile phones to reconfirm their personal identities through talking about brands and gossiping with friends at school who get more fashionable mobile phones will be examined in the next section.

7.2) Brand Talks and Gossip through Mobile Phones

This section aims to discuss mobile phone talks at school: it demonstrates young people's interaction through their preferences in talking about mobile phones and their activities in chatting on mobile phones, which is related to the cool culture of using cool mobile phone brands – in this sense handsets and networks. In this regard, mobile phone talk represents Thai teenagers' social interaction around cool brands in terms of creating their own culture through the way they 'talk' about brands related to their activities, routines and lifestyles. By examining this issue, my data will demonstrate the way my research participants display their cool brands through their private conversation, the role of gossip on mobile phones by showing intimate relationships within peer groups. Additionally, the discussion also includes their ways of seeking pleasure, as well as the way they use cool mobile phones through their public talks to represent their cool and modern selves. This theme reflects the way Thai teenagers use mobile phones as a transition to modernity to alter the nature of

their social interactions, i.e. from face-to-face to mobile-phone-to-face (Katz and Aakhus 2002), among their peer group in their social settings.

To consider how brand talks form part of the cool culture in school, my observations in both schools, St. John's School and Bangkapi Sukhum Navapan School, show the way my research participants display their cool brands through public conversations. The talks about the cool brands are used to reconfirm their personal identities amongst their friends which allow me to draw out an understanding of cool culture through mobile phone talk. These talks are constituted as a part of the interest between boys and girls at school, alongside the gender relationships and the expression of needs and desires around cool brands.

At St. John's School, the conversations of my research participants and their peer group in their everyday lives never take place without the topic of mobile phones. As one of my research participants noted, *at school, we talk about mobile phone promotions and the latest mobile phone handsets every day. For example, which is your favourite brand? How is this mobile phone's function used? Sometimes, we discuss which mobile phone provider's promotion is worthwhile* (Tabb, a 14-year-old schoolboy). In addition, *Tarr*, one of my research participants in *Tabb*'s group, said that *sometimes this topic leads to an argument between us in which we try to compete over things like whose model matches our styles. As such, Tabb's model is the best at the moment but other models have their own characteristics. I choose my Kyocera brand because I like it having the karaoke functions that the Sony Ericsson does not have.*

Similarly, *Weaw* and her group of friends, also research participants at St. John's school, maintains that *"Before class starts every day, my friends and I like to gather around the canteen and chat on the issue of mobile phones or other things. Not only do we talk about Nokia brand handsets that most of us have, in terms of their functions and non-voice services to compare with other brands, but we also talk about new ring tones that are odd or creative. These can be downloaded from the AIS service"* (Weaw, a 14-year-old schoolgirl). Up to this point, these in-depth interviews highlight the way Thai teenagers, who talk about the uses of premium brands among friends, bring the interests and concerns of their private feelings such as attitudes and

tastes into the public space (see Gillespie 1995). This information further allows me to show my fieldwork experiences in relation to gender interactions vis-à-vis mobile phone brands.

After school, Tabb and his friends always stayed together, chatting and engaging in such recreations as playing games on their mobile phones and exchanging them to download music, pictures and ring tones. While Tabb's group were playing together, on one occasion Weaw and her friends were passing and stopped to chat with Tabb's group. They started to talk about the new models of cool mobile phone brands that had been launched. For example, they were quite interested in Tabb's mobile phone handset, a Sony Ericsson P 800, and Binn's Samsung E 710 multi-shot model. Afterwards, Binn demonstrated how his Samsung E 710's multi-shot function worked. Weaw volunteered to be his model and posed like the female presenter on the Samsung E 710 TV commercial.

Their friends laughed at Weaw and Binn's antics. So far, this brings out that conversation was related to the models, networks and mobile phone brands they use. As has previously been observed, most of them are likely to use various models of Nokia, Samsung and Sony Ericsson. Additionally, AIS and DTAC are their favourite networks. Weaw started to daydream about a new mobile phone and began with the sentence *"If I were rich, I would buy another Nokia with a video phone function"*. To Weaw, this function is seen as superior to the digital camera that she has at the moment. This incident allows me to conclude that Thai teenagers display cool mobile phones in order to form images of whom and what they want to be. In this context, these public conversations about cool mobile phones provide a reconfirmation of these young people's identities to friends and the imagination of self-identity in this regard.

Accordingly, the cool and modern identity in relation to the cool brands used can be presented in the public space to demonstrate Thai teenagers' encouragement to adopt particular styles and tastes of mobile phone through mobile phone talks. Put more simply, Thai teenagers display their cool mobile phone brands by talking on their mobile phones to help them to appear more confident. My observation with my

research participants of the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School in the *MBK* shopping centre demonstrates this point.

While Mo, Vee and I were waiting for Golf in front of a Japanese restaurant, we saw one young man, dressed in a chic and modern style, who was also waiting for someone. He made constant calls on his mobile phone to kill time and to prevent embarrassment while waiting for someone in public. During his talk, he tried to show his latest cool mobile phone to draw the public gaze. We knew this was the case because we saw him make frequent calls when he started to have nothing to do. Furthermore, he always carried his latest model of mobile phone, a Nokia 7280, in his hand; its design looks like a submarine. Afterwards, he concentrated on talking on his mobile phone as if he was in another place that belonged to him only. Vee, who stood opposite him, began to gossip about his behaviour and said, *Hey...look at his latest mobile phone, it has just been launched this month, I think. He looks cool (Theh) with this handset. That's why he is always talking on his mobile phone.* But Mo brought out another point, *Maybe he lacks self-confidence: sometimes I have done something like this because I get bored waiting for a long time. But I'm not sure; does he actually make a real call to someone or pretend to do it, like just holding the mobile phone and nodding his head as if he was listening to someone when he is not?* Vee laughed at Mo and said *no one is crazy like you.* However, during his conversation, I noticed that Mo and Vee became annoyed with this young man because of his long talking on mobile phone. They tried to stare at his eyes to indicate that his talking was disturbing people. It seemed that he knew this, but he did not stop talking, although he did start to use a lower voice to continue his intimate talk.

The above account allows me to show how my research participants have an interaction with the young man who makes a long conservation on mobile phone. To interpret, they are sharing with me behind that guy in the sense that the young man uses the mobile phone as a part of his self and as a means of expression. It is shown that he uses cool mobile phone to draw the public gaze as he walks around talking loudly on his mobile phones. Furthermore, his conversation is open and overtly shared with the public; he does not mind who is listening to his conversation in public even if it is private. This is relevant to my survey research revealing that 58.2 per cent of my

research correspondents disagree with the sentence of *I think the personal matters should not be talked about on mobile phones.*

However, this issue is contrary to Cherry, one of my research participants, who expresses this view: *"I see many people talking loudly on their mobile phones. On the one hand, I think they want to present what models of cool brands they use to other people. On the other hand, they may think, 'we will never ever meet again'. Personally, if I could not talk about a private matter, I would say 'I will call you back'. However, if the other person can't wait, I will respond quietly and try to say something like... "yes...no...uhm...ok..." so that other people will not understand"* (Cherry, 20 year-old female).

To connect the public talks with the private talks, my material shows that Thai teenagers make use of the mobile phone as a symbolic resource which is available as they maintain an outgoing 'story' about themselves (see Moores 2000). My research suggests that there is a lot of privacy behind a phone and the intimate space identity can be constructed and reconstructed (Truch and Hulme 2004). Evidence of this process is provided by Nat, a 17-year-old schoolgirl at the Bangkapi Sukhum Navapun School, who expressed on this topic that *my boyfriend and I use mobile phones to update and check our activities because we study at different schools. In general, I tell him about my activities with friends in school, as does he. When I go out with friends, he always calls and checks where I am and whether I've arrived home safely. Sometimes, we discuss the daily conflict and tension among our friends* (Nat, 17-year-old girl).

The above account reflects the way Thai teenagers employ gossip on mobile phones, especially concerning intimate issues, to alter face-to-face interaction to mobile-phone-to-face interaction. One of my research participants demonstrated this when she said *I prefer to gossip about people on my mobile phone. It's better than gossiping about people behind their backs. This action is uglier* (Kookai, 17-year-old girl). Another account was provided by *Kwang*, a 14-year-old schoolgirl, who noted that *I like to gossip with my friends on my mobile phone at home, and sometimes at school. We use mobile phones to prevent the person who is being gossiped about from realising that he or she is being talked about* (Kwang, 14-year-old girl).

Furthermore, my research participants gossip on their mobile phones to disclose their problems of lacking high-technology ownership among friends. As one of my research participants expressed, *" Sometimes, I like to gossip about other people who have more fashionable mobile phones with my close friend on the mobile phone after school, because I don't want other friends to think that I'm envious. For example, one of my friends who has just bought the Nokia XXX... and showed it to everyone as if he had the best one. The way he talks about his mobile phone made me think that he looked down on my mobile phone. Actually, I thought the Samsung XXX was better than his* (Bird, a 17-year-old schoolboy)." This account reveals the social values of Thai teenagers that they admire wealth of others, plus a feeling of jealousy and greed towards those premium brands.

Another reason that my research participants are likely to gossip on mobile phone is that it is a way of bonding friendship. Private conversations on mobile phones can be regarded as representing emotional involvement and trust, a connection with friends and family (Livingstone 1992). My survey research showed that 49 per cent and 51 per cent of my research correspondents agreed and disagreed respectively with the sentence *I think sex talk is not a damaging issue, depending on whom I am talking to.* This finding allows me to consider the social and cultural changes in the contemporary Thai society regarding private conversations about intimate issues. As the Sussex Technology Group (2001:214) maintained, "the notion that people get pleasure out of intimate talk (and deeds) in public and semi-public places is not new, but the mobile phone can bring in a new dimension. Sex-talk on a mobile is a slightly more unusual form of this kind of exhibitionism".

In this sense, Thai teenagers exploit mobile phones in both good and bad ways. To talk about sex is seen as inappropriate in the Thai culture and Thai society, but it is seen cool as a deviant manner among the young. However, this view may change if Thai teenagers talk about sex issues on their mobile phones. This issue is supported by Mim, a 20-year-old female university student who notes that *I feel embarrassed when I talk about sex issues face-to-face. It's better to consult my friends on my mobile phone.* So although deviant, they are still embarrassed in general. This view is similar to that of Vee, a 17-year-old schoolboy who revealed that Thai society is more open and sex talk has become a normal issue among friends. However, sex issues still

form a prohibited subject for conversations within the family, and this is why Thai teenagers prefer to use mobile phones to talk about this topic.

However, gossip through mobile phones is a leisure activity occurring in particular among schoolgirls. It brings out a way of communicating which is indulged in and enjoyed by many and which varies from harmless chatter about people to the spreading of scandal and slander (Gillespie 1995:158). Gossip on mobile phones also helps to define the status of relations and the degree of closeness among the peer group. This finding was provided by *Pui*, a 14-year-old schoolgirl, one of my research participants, who expressed *"I like to gossip on my mobile phone with my close friend about a guy who sent an SMS to me last night. In my group, I am not close to everyone. So, I choose some friends who I can gossip with about the guy who is trying to court me. At this stage, I don't want many friends to know much about him, as they would gossip about me."*

Up to this point, the activity of gossiping through mobile phones has allowed me to show the interactions of my research participants vis-à-vis mobile phones, which enter private spaces as entertainment devices and fit into public spaces by replacing other leisure outdoor activities in school, i.e. playing sports. One of my encounters in St. John's School demonstrates this use of mobile phones.

At lunchtime, Tabb and his friends are likely to stay together and chat to others. Some of them withdraw to talk on their mobile phones in quiet areas while others listen to music, not on Walkmans but on MP3 mobile phones. In this context, Thai teenagers prefer to play games on their mobile phones and to chat with friends, including gossiping on the phone during their free time at school rather than participating in activities.

At school, however, the picture of Thai teenagers talking on mobile phones while engaged in a range of other activities is ever-present. For example, one 14 - 15-year-old girl was talking on her mobile phone while buying a coupon. She continued to talk while she was putting seasoning sauce into her noodle bowl. Then, she switched her mobile phone to her other hand because she needed her right hand to carry the noodles to the canteen table. While she was eating, she still continued to talk and

ignored her friends, who were sitting nearby. Sometimes, her friends interrupted her by asking her things, but she always returned to the telephone conversation. Among her friends, some of them read SMS messages, while others took photographs of their dishes using digital camera phones or took pictures of each other while they were eating. Around 15 minutes later, she finished her noodles but still kept talking until her friends left her at the table. She immediately ended her call and ran after her friends.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the notion of mobile phones as a symbol of the transition to modernity, where cool brands express the cool selves in terms of the wealth, success and trendiness of Thai teenagers in relation to what type of schools they are at, private or public, and the differences between the cool mobile phone networks they use, AIS and DTAC. This chapter has shown that the relationship between cool brands and the expression of cool selves is influenced by the peer group at school and by brand images. My research depicts the way in which brand images are communicated through product attributes or benefits by associating certain highly valued feelings with the brand. In this regard, two examples, AIS and DTAC, were given, the history of these networks and their successful in getting into 'teens' minds' in terms of choosing cool mobile phone networks that suit Thai teenagers' personalities and their interpretation of symbolic interactions. Thai teenagers actively interacted with the mobile phone in terms of creating a sense of identity and the imagination, or vice versa.

This chapter demonstrates that Thai teenagers have particular meanings to cool brands of handset, i.e. Nokia, Samsung and Motorola, and cool networks, i.e. AIS and DTAC. These brands can convey particular meanings to Thai teenagers in relation to peer groups and through their involvements in the socialization process. In this context, cool brands serve as symbolic resources to frame the cool self's identity, the personality and the social emulation of the peer group. In this regard, my research has displayed that Thai teenagers create their own culture and reconfirm their identities through talking on mobile phones in relation to public and private talk (gossip) at school. My material has shown that my research participants' gossip through phones

is a gender-specific activity which alters the nature of their social interactions; that is, from face-to-face to mobile-phone-to-face. My research illustrates the relationships between brand imagination and self-imagination in this regard, in terms of seeking pleasures and expressing cool and modern selves. In the next chapter, I will make the connection to Thai teenagers' expressions of their cool selves through their shared interpretations of the meanings of TV commercials.

Notes

[1] Tjong, Weber and Sternberg's (2003) contribution revealed that the mobile phone as "social gratification of mobility, access and convenience contributed to a similar "mobile phone culture" across both cultural groups." In particular, female users regard the mobile phone as a form of security.

[2] In the same way, the proportion of having video phone and having not of girls are 87.5 per cent. Meanwhile, the proportion of having video phone and having not of boys are 78.2 per cent. The significant percentage shows that boys have more hi-technology of mobile phone than girls have. The result had been tested by SPSS with the Cross tabulation's analysis.

[3] AIS and DTAC, rivals in the mobile phone market, were chosen for this case study for many reasons. Firstly, they have been popular mobile phone providers in Thailand since the inception of AIS in 1994 and DTAC in 1995, respectively. In 2004, AIS expected 15 millions users, representing 58% of the market share in the mobile phone market across the nation. Meanwhile, DTAC projected 10 millions users in the market, representing about 30% of the market share. These figures illustrate the fierce competition between these companies. As the Bangkok Post newspaper claimed, "AIS and DTAC have similar subscriber acquisition strategies for the lucrative grassroots segment in 2005, as it is expected to become "the single driving force" for building overall subscriber totals" (The Bangkok Post Economic Year-End 2004).

[4] Thompson (1995:210) describes the self as a symbolic project, which the individual must actively construct out of the available symbolic materials, materials which the individual 'weaves into a coherent account of who he or she is, a narrative of self-identity'.

Chapter 8

Talking about TV ads as an expression of modernity

This chapter will further explore how Thai teenagers express their cool-self images in terms of how they talk about TV ads as symbolic resources of identity. In doing so, I will examine the relationships of Tweens and Teens with advertising representations to consider their senses of advertising, which serves as a key institution of socialisation in modern culture. This argument will bring out the connections with the cool culture in terms of their use of cool brands and the interpretations that arise from a collective viewing of mobile phone TV commercials. The main concern here is with the ways in which they employ mobile phones to indicate social status, cultural belonging and taste preferences through evidence of selective exposure, selective perception and selective retention relative to the cool images in four mobile phone TV commercials (Renckstorf, McQuail and Jankowski 1996).

As previously noted, Appadurai (1996) argues that the world people live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life. For him, imagination as a social practice is a key component of the new global order. Thus, the consumption of global brands, in this sense the mobile phone, provides resources for self-imagining the way in which people deploy their brand imaginations in the practice of their everyday lives. The consumption of global brands aspires to create persons who would, after the fact, have wished to become modern. This contribution allows me to investigate Thai teenagers' articulations of the idea of modernity through talking about TV ads in terms of displaying cool mobile phone technology and using non-voice services, which are seen to represent a very desirable and idealized form of modern lifestyles for Thai teenagers.

As a way of doing this, I adopt the semiotic approach to bring out the young people's participation in the creation of meanings in messages. I will show that they also participate in creating signs and codes by themselves, which are relevant to the frame of the reference system. In examining this matter, I shall draw upon the process of encoding and decoding from Hall's (1980)[1] contribution and Morley's (1980 and

1986)[2] studies to consider how the meanings of four TV ads 'The Calling Melody': GSM Evolution from AIS, 'Happy birthday: 50 baht top up-card': DTAC, 'Marathon Calling': GSM 1800, and 'The quality network': AIS as interpreted by Thai teenagers may be varied and diverse. Therefore, four focus groups (for more detail, see Appendix 3), with high-school boys and high-school girls as well as male and female university students, were undertaken in this regard, to incorporate variations in age, gender, education and social background.

Throughout this chapter, I will examine four mobile phone TV commercials through the conversations of my focus group participants, discussing each commercial in two parts. In the first part, I shall consider the illustrative nature of TV commercials in terms of the style of presentation, the ideas portrayed and the production techniques used, to show why these four mobile phone TV commercials became the 'talk of the town' amongst Thai teenagers overnight. My research displays that Thai teenagers make meaning of advertising representations in the sense that they could recall the stories portrayed in the advertisements; they could sing the jingles; they could emulate the advertisement copy; and they talked about their favourite advertisements with their friends. This talk connects with social settings such as homes as their private spaces and schools and department stores as their public spaces.

This framework underpins the question of how specifically Thai teenagers, as active audiences, make sense of mobile phone use in relation to their own values, beliefs and symbolic systems in their everyday experiences and their social relations. Moreover, I will further develop such argument in relation to the decoding and will also discuss it alongside issues of advertising representation through copies, logos, presenters, costumes, props and settings, lighting and framing (Bignell 2002; Lacey 1998; Dyer 1982; Williamson 1978). By examining this issue, I will be able to show how each focus group, the members of which are varied and from different backgrounds, makes sense of these representations through their talks about ads using connotation and denotation levels.

Focusing upon this point, my research will display the ways in which these associated representations of cool and modern selves in relation to mobile phones become evident when talking about TV ads. The talks about the ad are the basis of common

experiences and interactions through which Thai teenagers create individual identities from advertising symbolic meanings in their everyday lives (McCracken 1986; Willis 1990; Morley and Robins 1995). Here, the active audience paradigm has been centrally employed by looking at how Thai teenagers negotiate and perceive the meanings of mobile phone representations that reflect the idea of being modern through an interpretative process used by individuals in dealing with what they encounter, such as advertising representations and brand images (see Blumer 1969).

In the second part, I shall ground the process of decoding or interpreting those signs with which Thai teenagers are actively engaged to show how they reflect their understandings of modernity and how this notion is understood through displays of mobile phone technology and non-voice services etc. I argue that mobile phone TV commercials might form part of a setting wherein mobile phones have become cool and modern for Thai teenagers. Therefore, my research material will reveal how Thai teenagers articulate their preferences, experiences, distinctions and aspirations through talking about the mobile phone TV commercials to which they are exposed in their everyday lives (see Gillespie 1995). As Gillespie (ibid:176) maintains, "TV commercials function as myths and metaphors, providing people with simple stories and explanations through which certain ideals and values are communicated and through which people organize their thoughts and experiences and come to make sense of the world in which they live". The ways in which Thai teenagers employ their different knowledge backgrounds to decode messages from the same advertisements and generate particular forms of preferred or dominant codes, the negotiated code and the oppositional code [3] (see Hall 1980) have been examined. How this decoding connects with their activities through mobile phones will be demonstrated here in terms of habitus.

Throughout this chapter, I aim to demonstrate the production of each of these TV commercials as constructed sets of sign units which carry such messages as the denotative and connotative meanings, which serve the ideological myths perpetuated in advertising for Thai teenagers (Bignell 2002; Gillespie 1995; Williamson 1978). By examining this issue, I shall make a connection of cool images as myths in advertising by looking at how the idea of modernity fits into talking about TV ads through various issues. For example, the modern courtship of Thai teenagers is examined

through GSM Evolution's 'calling melody' campaign, while the 'Happy birthday: 50 baht top-up card' from DTAC is studied in the light of 'puppy love' amongst Thai teenagers, particularly in the Tween subculture. Meanwhile, the 'Marathon Calling' campaign presents a picture of modern family life in Thai society, particularly in the nuclear family, and the way in which mobile phones are becoming incorporated into children's everyday lives. Furthermore, the concept of AIS as 'the quality network' represents advanced communication, which has played a significant role in Thai society. That is, I will show how Thai people, particularly in Thai teenagers can use mobile phones via M-banking, M-cinema booking and Internet functions to enhance their lives.

TV ads – talk of the town

This section considers the social interactions of Tweens and Teens related to talking about TV ads to show how four mobile phone TV commercials became the talk of the town among them overnight. I will then discuss these advertisements in relation to Thai teenagers expressing their cool images through talking about TV ads as their symbolic resources of identity. Thus, in terms of the analysis of visual aspects and film techniques, the semiotic approach has been employed to bring out the symbolic meanings of advertising texts by looking at the process of creating meaning (Bignell 2002; Innis 1985)[4] among Thai teenagers through 'The Calling Melody' from GSM Evolution (AIS), and 'Happy birthday: 50 baht top-up card' from DTAC with its Happy D prompt, followed by 'Marathon Calling' from GSM 1800 and 'The quality network' from AIS.

1). Cool Image with the Calling Melody from AIS [5]

In order to investigate the creation of meanings from visual elements, the participants of my four focus groups (for more details, see Appendix 3), i.e. the high-school boys and girls, as well as the female and male university students, who vary in terms of their different backgrounds, are asked to note the symbolization and explain what the images in the advertisements mean, as well as which features or elements of each TV commercial are impressive to them. After displaying the calling melody from AIS network, my focus group participants start to talk about male and female Teen

presenters, the songs used in the calling melody services, and the various reactions of the girls in this TV ad to the calling melody which appear in the scenes. They subsequently talk about how these advertising representations relate to their use of mobile phones in their everyday lives.

My observations after the viewing of the calling melody ad demonstrate that my focus group participants, especially in the male university students group, vote that they like this TV ad much more than they do the others. They like it because the concept of this TV ad is relevant to their courtships in terms of their using the calling melody as a medium for the expression of feeling. In this sense, this service is associated with Teens' lifestyles, as it is perceived as cool and modern among friends to use a calling melody rather than the normal signal. This finding is confirmed by *Pig*, one of my research participants in the male university student group, who is now using this calling melody. He tells me that this advertisement is a hit among Thai teenagers because its soundtrack features familiar popular music by a Thai boy band that was very popular at the time. This service enables people to listen to pop music as a calling melody instead of the normal signal while they are waiting for somebody to pick up the phone, which is seen by him as a cool function.

As noted, the representations of the calling melody have become the talk of the town amongst Thai teenagers in the same way that my focus groups participants can sing all these songs. The distinction of this TV commercial is presented through various hit songs, as supported by *Pae*, an 18 year old, one of my research participants in the high-school girls group, who emulates this TV commercial's story with friends. *Teen boys and girls in this TV ad are at the beginning of courtship. They look sweet and lovely. The songs went directly to my heart. I like this TV ad because of the various songs. I can sing all these songs with my friends. Some of them have downloaded these songs as their calling melodies. So, my friends and I like to call them 'copying this advertisement'.*

While viewing this TV ad, most of my focus group participants, in particular in the high-school boys group, can recall the names of various hit songs and know which songs are by which bands. As *Bird*, one of my research participants in the schoolboy group, puts it, *"there are four songs from four boy bands such as Big Ass band,*

Bangkok Gigolo band, Black Head band and Paradox band. These songs are big hits at this moment". Furthermore, the calling melody service is associated with Thai teenagers' cool image in the sense that they are looked at as being modern when they use this new service alongside the representation of this TV commercial to others. *Dee*, one of my research participants in the male university student group, points out that the actions of Teen boys in terms of their using the calling melody are relevant to the narrator's voice-over, which says *"The hot non-voice service of Calling Melody allows you to choose the music or the words of popular artists to give to your guys while they are waiting for you to pick up their calls. The more you change the song, the hotter you are."* This view is similar to that of *Neng*, another participant in the male university student group, who notes, *"This TV ad implied that you are not cool if you do not use this service. Unfortunately, my network is not AIS. Otherwise, I would use this service to get a cool image."*

A cool image portrayed when using the calling melody service allows me to show several reasons for my focus group participants appreciating this TV commercial because it presents several aspects of Teen subculture and popular culture, such as popular songs by Thai pop/rock singers, courting between Thai teen girls and boys, the way they dress and the way they incorporate mobile phones into their everyday lives. Apart from talking about the beautiful songs, my focus group participants also focus on the good looks of the presenters, both the teen boys and girls. In particular, two young men in this TV commercial use various songs as their calling melody and a medium to express their feelings to girls. Up to this point, most of my research participants respond in the same way that those two young men are ordinary teens in Thai society; they are not superstars or celebrities. I found that each group, especially the schoolboys and the male university students, expresses that the style of the two young male presenters is relevant to their ideal characteristics. As Vee, one of my research participants in the high-school boys group, demonstrates, *their appearances were charming but looked sur..sur (surreal)*. This response is similar to another view provided by *Champ*, one of my research participants in the male university students group, who says *their looks were crazy or arrogant; most women like their looks.*

These accounts allow me to further discuss the characteristics of two young men in the TV ad who are not celebrities or superstars but become the ideal type of man and

make impressions on my research participants. As such, *Neng*, one of my research participants in the male university student group, expresses, *"they are not handsome but they are good looking. That is why many girls like them. So I would like to be like these guys."*

In this sense, the calling melody is being signified and the correlating thing or person is the signifier of the symbol of the hot and the cool in terms of using the mobile phone to court girls (Williamson 1978). This issue is supported by *Ton*, one of my research participants in the schoolboy group, who says, *"This TV commercial shows they are cool men because they use the calling melody to attract girls. That's why they are popular."*

Not only do the high-school boys group and the male university students group want to have those characteristics, but the female university students group also admire these characteristics of the two presenters. One of my research participants in the female university students group makes more comments on this: *"I like the two young men and I like their causal clothes. They look artistic in style or surrealist. They are my type"* (Mim, 21 years old).

However, different comments are provided by the high-school girls group, who say they are not crazy about these guys in the TV ad because their looks are not their ideal type. Thus, they are not interested in them. Rather, they prefer the look and style of several of the girls presented in this TV commercial. For example, the action of those girls look funny and they dare to express themselves (Kookai, 17 year old, high-school girls group). Furthermore, they are beautiful. Men like their styles; for example, they have white skin and wear long hair. They are also tall and skinny (Kate, 18 year old, high-school girls group). The freedom of my research participants' interpretations of the ideal type of woman enables me to see the connection of the imaginary and the associated ad representation (Williamson ibid). They show that the ideal type of women in relation to cool images in terms of using non-voice services has reflected the idea of modernity, which I will analyse in the next section.

Thus, the calling melody can be seen as an index and as symbolic of popular sense. It signifies that the more frequent the ring tones ring, the more popular the young men are among girls. This enables me to explain the discussion of my research

participants, in particular the male university group, who argue that the new song could be referred to as a new girl. In this ad, many girls call two young men to listen to the popular songs from the calling melody service. The meanings of songs are meant to be associated with the feelings that young men want to express to the particular girls. My observations during the focus group discussion in the male university students group demonstrate these points.

The group of close friends, *Neng, Pig, Dee, Champ, Bert* and *Tee*, who are studying media communication in a private university in Bangkok, are invited to be my focus group participants. During the viewing of the calling melody ad, other people in the male university students group notice that there are four songs from four boy bands that match the actions of the four girls in this TV commercial; in addition, they can sing all four songs to confirm this. As *Tee*, a 21 year old, maintains, the first song, which has the meaning *"you are the right one; you are the person of my dreams"*, is used for the sweet girl. She smiles and her face expresses her happiness, as if this song implied a specific meaning to her. At this moment, I see most of them smile and look at each other. Afterwards, *Champ* points to *Bert* and says *"Hey....that's your song."* Then *Bert* replies that *"this girl in the TV ad is also my type."* This made everyone laugh at him. After that, their friends tell me, he has also sent beautiful songs to beautiful girls but he always fails to court girls. However, Bert is seen as cool to other friends since he has done this.

These interpretations show that those popular songs in the TV ad could be symbolic codes in terms of being associated with the action of these girls, who are shown to illustrate the meanings of the songs. Thus, the meanings of the songs can signify and be associated with the actions of each girl. For example, my research participants demonstrate the meaning of unfulfilled love expressed by the girl falling down. One of my research participants in the male university student group describes the meanings of these songs, which are related to the acting of the presenters, in this regard.

> *I noticed that the camera zoomed in on the face of the cute girl to signify*
> *the meaning of the song as "you are the right one; you are the person of*
> *my dreams". On the other hand, when the song changed its meaning to*

"you are cute, you are lovely," I could see the girl lay down on the floor. This phase signified that the message was going directly to her heart as if she heard the man on the other end telling her face to face. Then, the melody changed to a new song with a slow rhythm. The meaning of this song refers to "unfulfilled love". The new girl slipped down under the table (Neng, 21 years old, male university student group).

Alongside the discussion of the meanings of the song, one of my research participants in the female university group states in this regard that *"it has been noticed that various songs might serve for several girls, who can be referred to as Gigs rather than girlfriends"* (Nan, 20 years old, female university group). Similarly, my research participants in the schoolgirls and the female university group mostly describe these girls in this TV ad as girlfriends or Gigs (as mentioned in Chapter 6), rather than friends. This denotation is supported by *Bee* in the female university students group. Bee is a person who comments on this issue that *"they should be girlfriends because her facial expression showed that she was happy to hear the music, as it was singing "you are cute and lovely". If these girls were normal friends, TV ads should show male as well as female friends."* A similar view is provided by *Keaw*, one of my research participants in the high-school girls group, who confirms that *"they are surely Gigs of the two young men because a girlfriend should only be one person. In the ads, four girls called them. So, they were Gigs."* However, this is in contrast to the view of *Bud*, one of my research participants in the high-school boys group, who notes that *"they might be just friends. They called them just to hear the popular music."*

This material allows me to analyse different denotations between male and female research participants in relation to the calling melody service that is used in this case as part of courtship. I shall then make a connection between the relationship of talking about TV ads and the display of mobile phones in my research participants' everyday experiences, which can be elaborated by the use of this calling melody service to relate to a cool and modern image. My research participants in the female group are aware of the males flirting other girls secretly like they do by keeping in touch with them via their mobile phones. For example, males save different names for their Gigs in their mobile phones so that their girlfriends do not discover their affairs.

These shared meanings indicate their common experiences through TV ads as symbolic resources to associate with their real lives (See Gillespie 1995). Furthermore, the male group expresses a desire for alternative images; the idea of being cool and modern relates to the perception of using the calling melody to show others without concerning the sexual matters. This issue is related to *Bud*, one of my research participants in the schoolboy group, who expresses on this matter:

> *I have one friend who uses this service. He leaves his mobile phone with*
> *me while he is playing football. He tells me not to pick up the phone if*
> *the phone rings. Sometimes, people call him just to listen to the music*
> (Bud, 17 years old, high-school boy).

This response is similar to that of *Dee*, one of my research participants in the male university student group who notes *I think this service might reduce the stress of people who are calling. They can listen to the music rather than wondering how long someone will take to pick up the phone*. These accounts add to other materials in which my focus group participants in each group have had a variety of social interactions with the calling melody in terms of expressing their cool images and giving a sense of courtship to girls through popular songs. This connection then allows me to discuss how my focus group participants actively decode the symbolic meanings through talking about TV ads. This decoding is articulated through the particular forms of preferred, negotiated and oppositional readings which are relevant to their experiences.

Teens' courtship culture - the ideal types of women

As noted, Thai teenagers express their cool images in relation to the calling melody service as symbolic resources in forming identity. I argue that the calling melody service not only presents a new cool service to Thai teenagers, but also illuminates the narratives of courtship in terms of intimate relationships through mobile phones amongst the Teen subculture in the modern culture. This argument highlights the interpretations of Thai teenagers towards social values and cultural changes in Thai contemporary society and shows how the changes are experienced regarding Thai teenagers' modern lifestyles and their interactions with mobile phones.

In this sense, they contribute to the construction of this calling melody service by setting various songs to express their feelings to others.

In this context, my focus group participants show their preferred reading of this TV commercial in the sense that mobile phones with the calling melody service make young teens look hot and cool amongst girls. As the advertisement's copy claims, *"The more you change, the hotter you are. To look cool and to be proud of yourself with the latest mobile phone might not be enough, you must have the non-voice service with the "calling melody" to be super cool."* This claim is related to my research participants, particularly in the male group, who show how they act through this service as a hotter way of courting each other. As *Champ*, one of my research participants in the male group notes,

> *Previously, sending feelings and thoughts through SMS was cool. Now, we have MMS that allows us to send pictures with it, and that is seen as cooler. Here, the calling melody service seems to be hotter because it makes people want to call us more to listen to the music. Sometimes, my girlfriend and I have a fighting. She does not want to pick up the call and she sets her calling melody to a song that expressed disappointed love and sadness. So, she gives some senses of her being upset through the song* (Champ, 21 year old, male university student group).

This issue of cool ways of courting is relevant to *Bert*, one of my research participants in the male university students group who notes that he occasionally has a more intimate relationship through the calling melody service. As he puts it, *I chose the music which has an implied meaning to the girls who are listening to the calling signal. It is better than telling her directly about my feelings. Moreover, a girl will feel more intimacy when heard of the song that I put in the calling melody. I hope that when she goes somewhere and hears that song, she will miss me. The meanings of a song can indicate my feelings to her.* These accounts enable me to see that Thai teenagers interact through their mobile phones not only to achieve intimacy but also to make an impression with the calling melody service to form their new identities as being cool and modern.

This finding is parallel with my focus group participants in the female university students group who discussed that the calling melody can also be used by a girl as a means of expression in modern courtship. In the Thai context, modern courtship is seen as distinct from traditional expectations about Thai teenagers, in particular, Teen girls that they should not express their feelings explicitly to men. However, my research suggests that Thai teenagers use this calling melody to constitute new forms of identity as being cool and modern in terms of relating music interactions to new experiences in courtship. As a way of examining this topic, my focus group participants, especially in the Teen boy group, provide their understandings of negotiated readings of this TV commercial in that this calling melody service shows popular songs that are relevant to popular young men and subsequently elaborates the *Gig* culture, which can be seen as a modern subculture in Thai society.

In this regard, *Bird*, a 17 year old, one of my research participants in the high-school boys group, explains that the calling melody ad illuminates the *Gig* culture. He further suggests that the various songs in this TV ad signify the accumulation of *Gigs*. This allows me to introduce another research participant who is in the same group as *Bird* and who points out that *Men don't feel confident in themselves; therefore, they have to date several girls to pick the best one* (Bud, 17 years old, school boy). Additionally, the dating of several girls at the same time is seen as normal for *Pig,* one of my research participants in the male university student group who notes *I think the ratio of men and women in Thai society is not balanced. There are considerably more women than men. Thus, it is not surprising to see that the women call the men first.* This material shows that the rights of men and women in Thai society have become closer to being equal, such as the example of having *Gigs*.

To some extent, my research displays how this TV ad applied various popular Thai songs to create the advertisement's appeal through associating these songs with the calling melody service. This finding is related to my argument in the sense that Thai teenagers incorporate this service to express their cool images. It can be argued that in the current Teen subculture, Teen boys are more likely to be open-minded in dating many girls at the same time. This behaviour shows the characteristics of a modern person in terms of having more freedom as part of modernity. One of my female university students interprets the preferred reading of this ad. As she put it, *"it can be*

implied that the modern courtship of teens fluctuates, or is not real. There are some latent messages in this ad, such as that the more you change the songs, the better you are. It is related to the idea that the more you change your women, the cooler you are" (Mim, 21 years old, female university student). *Mim* ironically says that this TV ad shows teen boys using the calling melody as a means of expression.

During the discussion, my focus group participants in the female university student group thus express that their opinion of the actions of the girls in the TV commercial who call men first is that it is not suitable for the image of Thai women, who should reserve their feelings, as stated in the traditional Thai proverb *Ruk Naun Sa Nguan Tuoa* (as previously mentioned in Chapters 4 and 6), which can be translated into English to mean that Thai girls or Thai women should not exploit their body sexually and should not behave in misleading ways in terms of sexual issues. This TV ad shows the new image of Thai women who can express their feelings to men by calling them first. This issue is supported by *Bee*, one of my research participants in the female university students group who discussing the action of girls in the TV ad: *Women calling men first is not appropriate in traditional Thai culture. The action of women falling to the floor because they are listening to the music looks ugly. It presents an alien culture rather than the Thai one.*

This account allows me to show the disparity between the traditional Thai custom that Thai women should behave in a reserved way and the modern behaviour of the *Gig* culture in the context of modernity, which can be seen as the resistance of Thai women to traditional authority. This finding demonstrates that Thai women have the same rights as Thai men in terms of having choices and the freedom concerning seeking their lovers. This issue shows that the Thai women in these ads may be seen as explicitly expressing their feelings to the opposite sex first in that they might be courting two young men simultaneously. Although *Mim* does not agree with the young men in this TV ad who use the calling melody to present their cool images, she accepts the changes in women's behaviours and their freedom to court men in the modern culture. As she states in this regard,

It illuminated the courtship of youth culture. In the ads, many girls called the two men first so as to listen to the music. In turn, this also signifies

that girls are courting men first. So, this behaviour becomes part of youth culture in the modern society (Mim, 21 years old, female university student).

This finding is similar to the contention of some of my research participants in the high-school girls group, who argue that it is acceptable for Thai women to call men first and that this does not matter in the modern culture. This issue allows me to connect the way they court each other through mobile phones in their everyday lives. In this sense, Thai girls also use mobile phones as a means of expression to facilitate the courtship. One comment is made by *Nid*, a 17 year old in the high-school girls group who maintains that the mobile phone can be used for her courting. Girls are finding it easier to date guys. As she further puts it, *to invite guys to date face-to-face is seen as more shameful than sending an SMS to invite them. It helps to prevent me from losing my face.* Furthermore, another similar comment is made by *Kookai*, who is in the same group, who said that *I give my mobile phone number to a guy if he wants to talk or gets to know me. However, it does depend on his appearances.*

The above account allows me to provide an oppositional reading in that the message is decoded in a contrasting way by my focus group participants in the high-school boys group. In the sense, the calling melody can lead to annoying issues rather than looking cool and modern. This issue is explained by *Mo*, one of my research participants in the high-school boys group, who maintains, *I think people who call want the owner to pick up the phone as soon as possible. No one wants to listen to the music any longer or call others just to hear the music. If they want to listen to music, why don't they turn on the radio instead?* This is a slightly different view to that of *Dee*, one of my participants in the male university student group who notes, *I think in a different way: if I don't want to pick up the incoming call, I will let them listen to the music. It can reduce stress.*

After the TV commercial viewing, my material shows that my research participants talked about the advertising representation in terms of relating the calling melody to their cool images as myths which reflect their ideal types of women (Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1986; Gillespie 1995). In examining this point, the characteristics of these Teen

girl presenters can be seen to connote tastes and preferences which may represent the ideal types of women in the Teen subculture.

In traditional Thai culture, the image of a Thai woman was a lady with gentle and good manners; her appearance with honey-coloured skin, long healthy hair, a good figure, a beautiful face, and big black eyes are popular attractions among men. However, that image became outdated when the contemporary advertising representations presented the new image of a Thai woman with long hair and a slim figure like a model, not necessarily being beautiful but looking cute, as well as having pale skin, the appearance of which is mostly seen in the Sino Thai ethnic group. These thus reflect a new ideal type of women in Thai society. A Thai cliché reflects the ideal type of women: *Kao, Suoy, Muoy, Sex,* which can be translated into English as "white skin, beautiful, Sino Thai and having sex appeal". This cliché leads me to explore young people's idealised images of their ideal types of women, which has now changed from the traditional to the modern age. This issue is supported by *Champ*, 21 years old, one of the male university students group, who notes *my type of woman is similar to the Japanese or Korean style. She has to dress well and look clean.* In this sense, the Japanese and Korean women have the appearance of Sino Thai girls. Furthermore, *Neng,* a research participant in the same group as *Champ*, also makes a comment on the issue of ethnicity concerning why the Sino Thai girl has become their ideal type of woman. As he put it, *full Thai bloods are mostly not white skinned, and are not more attractive to men than the Sino Thai girls. Sino Thai girls are lovelier than full Thai blood girls. Moreover, they are richer.*

2). Can I be more than your friend?

While viewing the *Happy birthday: 50 baht top up card from DTAC*[6] advert, my research participants are impressed with the gimmick of a story showing a slice of life: in this sense, the Tween lifestyle of which they are part. Furthermore, the dialogue between the Tween boy and girl was seen as relevant to Thai teenagers' everyday lives. In this regard, Thai teenagers are likely to imitate the dialogue from this TV commercial in their daily lives. For example, the Tween boy who is the key character says *"Pen Mak Kwa Puan Dai Mai" (Can I be more than your friend?)* This quote allows me to show how my research participants adopt this sentence as a

popular phrase at the beginning of courtship. This sentence has become the talk of the town among Thai teenagers, as supported by *Bud*, one of my research participants in the schoolboy group who incorporates this phrase into his practice. As he notes, *this TV ad shows the way a young man interacts with a young girl by giving a gift in a cool way. My friends adopt this popular sentence like a gimmick when they are too embarrassed to approach a girl*. This idea is similar to that of *Neng*, one of my research participants in the male university student group who maintained that girls like exciting words which do not explicitly express feelings and that girls are impressed with this popular sentence that he uses to show his cool image.

To use this sentence to express their cool selves according to the TV ad can be associated with the puppy love in the Tween subculture at the early stages of courtship. Furthermore, the 'Happy birthday: 50 baht top-up card' in this TV ad can be seen as a symbol of happiness, equal to the gift that the Tween boy gives to the Tween girl. It is portrayed not as a luxury but as a special item for a special person. DTAC adds this value to their brand through the concept of saying 'happy', which suggests that customers are happy to use it, perhaps because the top-up card costs 50 baht, or less then 50p, and is thus available to people with low incomes, especially Tween groups.

The Happy top-up card as a birthday gift is discussed here in order to consider how the product correlation is engaged in my research participants' everyday lives. This leads me to provide *Champ*'s account, one of my research participants in the male university group who noted that giving the happy top-up card as a gift is a cool idea because it is cheap but looks unique, as the advertising copy claims. *Ton*, one of my research participants in the schoolboys group, notes that it *is a good idea to court a girl with, as it is a small investment. If I bought chocolate or flowers, it might be more expensive than the happy top-up card for 50 Baht*. This behaviour shows the economical values of Thai middle class teenagers, especially men, expressed through the gift for females; on the other hand, it reflects female's expectation of the gifts in relation to gender relationship during their courtships.

In the modern Thai context, Thai male teenagers are rather concerned about economic issues when they court a girl, which reflects the changes of social value of Thai male

teenagers. That is, love is now related to business issues in the sense that a male makes less investment when he courts a female. In this sense, the male seeks much more profits from a small investment. However, the contrasting expectations of a girl when she is being courted like that in this TV ad are provided by *Mim*, one of my research participants in the female university student group who shares this view: *normally, a birthday gift will be put in a birthday box. And the box should be big, which means there is a precious thing inside. But here, it is the Happy top-up card. It is a bit of a disappointment.* Mim's expectation of a gift is different from other views, especially those in the schoolgirls group who maintain that most of them are pleased to welcome the Happy top-up card, which implies a big value inside: the heart of the sender.

During the discussion, most of the research participants perceive the Happy top-up card as a symbol of happiness. They buy the happy top-up card in order to become part of the subgroup it represents. According to this TV ad, my research participants discuss these visual representations concerning several points. First, we look at the characteristics and personality of the Tween boy and girl. The details of their clothes also signify a particular type of personality. Put another way, "styles of clothes are part of the social and symbolic construction of a self" (Gillespie 1995:179). This point illustrates the indexical signs that can be interpreted in the context of the Tween subculture. One of my research participants demonstrates this point: *They are neatly dressed and are good at studying. The way they are teasing each other made me think it is their first love, especially in the scene where the Tween girl hits her head on the pole. It looks funny* (Bird, 17 years old, high-school boy). This acting builds the connection of puppy love with common experiences of my research participants, in particular the schoolboy and schoolgirl group.

Furthermore, one of my research participants who wears dental braces embeds her experiences in the character of the Tween girl, who also wears dental braces. This shows her related identity as trendy. As she maintains, *the girl as the host of a birthday party has dental braces in her mouth. It is a trend amongst the Tween subculture at the moment. It becomes fashion as many girls and boys like to do it; so do I* (Nan, 21 years old, female university student). Up to this point, my research participants provide their denotations through the characteristics of the two presenters

which relate to the way the Tween boy in this TV ad approaches the girl. *Pae*, one of the research participants in the schoolgirl group, expresses her decoding in the sense that *The Tween boy is in the same age group as I am. His look is lovely; shy and humble. He wears a normal white T-shirt which has a silkscreen painting of a dog watching an aeroplane in the middle. It looks cute; I like it* (Pae, 18 years old, high-school girl).

Focusing upon the symbolic meaning of the picture on the Tween boy's T-shirt, my research participants discuss that it is a symbol of the Tween boy's status, in this sense the Tween boy is seen as poorer than the Tween girl. *Dee*, one of my research participants, points that he is poor because he merely gives the 50 Baht (less than 50 p) top-up card to the girl. This difference in status refers to a Thai proverb, "*Mha Hen Kreng Bin*" (a dog watching an aeroplane). This proverb also implies unreachable love. One of my research participants share his view in this regard: *"When courting a girl, we cannot say whether we will be successful in love or not. It looks like a dog watching an aeroplane, when the aeroplane signifies the girl"* (Bud, 17 years old, high-school boy).

Furthermore, the last point to be made here at the connotative level is the significance of the birthday party in the Tween subculture. The birthday party as a social function is perceived as an important event in the Tween subculture. Thai teenagers usually receive gifts from parents and friends at their birthday parties. The gifts, however, can also signify popularity of a person among their peer group. In this TV ad, the Tween girl who is the host holds her party in her house rather than at a discotheque or in a pub. This illuminates the conservative approach to courtship among Thai teenagers in the modern culture, as provided by *Mo*, one of my research participants in the schoolboy group. As he puts, *I think this TV ad shows a good approach to courtship. It is undertaken with the parents in the house.* However, this is slightly different to the view of *Champ*, one of my research participants in the male university group who argues that *"this is because they are still in the Tween age group: they are not grown up like Teens, but they are more mature than children. If they were Teens, they might have had birthday parties in a pub or discotheque where there is more amusement."* Their reflections on the above help build my argument in the sense that Thai teenagers view advertising as symbolic resources to draw on their identities, and it

serves as a key institution of socialisation in their life experiences and knowledge. Discussing this issue, my research participants show how this TV ad is relevant to their experiences in terms of the beginning of courtships, so-called puppy love, in relation to mobile phone use, as to be explored in the next section.

My Puppy Love and my Gig

Alongside the discussion of the TV ad, my research participants indicate that the Happy top-up card illuminates a slice of their lives with regard to matters of courtship. It also demonstrates their puppy loves, to which the presenters of this TV ad are relevant. Furthermore, the preferred reading in this TV ad shows the 50 baht Happy top-up card as the cheapest card available for 'small guys', which can be interpreted as referring to the Tween subculture. One of my research participants connotes the meaning of this card as follows: "*it is an economical card; in other words, it's called the emergency card. Due to the cheap price, it is suitable for Teens*" (Mo, 17 years old, high-school boy). Additionally, the Happy top-up card can present a unique form of happiness as a birthday gift. The negotiated reading is provided by *Bee*, one of my research participants in the female university student group who expresses that if she got a creative gift like this, she would be happy. This view is related by *Nid*, one of my research participants in the schoolgirl group, who notes *it is good to be used by high-school students like us who haven't got too much money*.

These above negotiated readings allow me to achieve my argument which connects to previous chapters in the sense that Thai teenagers are divided into two subclasses, the new rich middle class and the median middle class, and that they reflect different ideas of conspicuous consumption and social emulation or economical values respectively. Up to this point, some of my research participants provide oppositional readings. That is, in the case of those engaged in conspicuous consumption, as the Happy top-up card is cheap, it does not provide enough talk-time for Tweens, meaning that they end up buying many top-up cards each month. One of my research participants sheds light on this: "*if the purpose of talking is related to courtship, it is surely not enough*" (Dee, 21 years old, male university student). This remark enables me to demonstrate that my research participants share through cross-gendered

gossiping their common experiences of puppy love and courtship, which reflects modern Thai society in the Tween subculture. Most of my research participants express that their puppy love began at secondary school. Furthermore, the mobile phone is engaged in the social interactions of Thai teenagers in terms of becoming a new form of communication in courting. *Kookai*, one of my research participants in the schoolgirl group, makes a comment that *I think nowadays the relationships of Tweens in courting are so fast. They have just exchanged mobile phone numbers. After talking, they have decided to be girlfriend and boyfriend.* However, this puppy love reflects upon the sense of innocence, which is supported by *Bird*, one of my research participants in the schoolboy group, who noted, *This TV ad showed a different point from the Calling Melody. This TV ad presented the Tween subculture in courtship as sincere, honest and innocent. It differs from the Calling Melody, which showed flirting and unfulfilled love.*

The above opinions allow me to connect the relationship of the courtship between Thai teenagers and the way they incorporate the mobile phone into their everyday lives. My research discovers that the schoolgirl group reflects modern social values in terms of equal rights and the way in which women can now court men first. This idea is in contrast to Thai traditional custom, as I mentioned previously. *Nat*, one of my research participants in the schoolgirl group, expresses her oppositional reading on this issue that sometimes she courts men first because men do not dare to court her. She further states that just asking a guy for his mobile phone number is easy. This issue refers to the Gig who is not serious about the commitment. Similarly, one of my research participants in the schoolgirl group notes *"it depends on the situation. If I like men as Gigs, it doesn't take time. One day I will know whether he likes me or not"* (Nid, 17 years old, high-school girl). However, another research participant makes the point that if she really likes someone, it takes a very long time for her to start courting him (Kate, 18 years old, high-school girl).

However, the schoolboy group provides slightly different opinions from those of the schoolgirl group, as they still perceive that the puppy love for them is not a joke or nonsense. They also do not rush girls into a courtship. As *Ton*, one of my research participants in the schoolboy group, shares, *if I like someone, I might ask her friend to be a medium to court the girl and keep her mobile phone number for a long time*

before calling. This is related to the view of *Bus*, who comes from the same group and who saying *I do not dare to talk to a girl about liking or not liking them. If I said I like her first, she might think that I was too keen to push her into courtship*. In the Thai context, my observation demonstrates that girls take mobile phones as a means of expression and a modern way to overcome their shyness towards boys. On the other hand, boys seem to be more concerned than girls about long-term relationships, in particular a relationship with a girl who they really like.

3). Daddy...not this song, here, this song

This section demonstrates the way my research participants have incorporated visual representations in terms of the signs, indices and symbols of the Marathon Calling[7] TV ad into their imaginations and their childhood. During their viewing of this TV ad, I notice that most of my research participants laugh at the actions of the little cute girl who sings a sports song for her father via a mobile phone after she has finished a sports day at school. The song she sings is familiar to most Thai children, as most of my research participants can emulate this song. For example, the common child experience is provided by *Dol*, one of my research participants in the female university student group, who shares: *"This ad used a song that we used to sing at our sports days ten years ago. It drew our attention and referred us back to our childhood. In addition to the little cute girl, this song made the ad much more memorable*. The song that the little girl sang is popularly used on sports days. *Mim*, one of my research participants in the female university student group, provides her memories of the sports day song, which is associated with her childhood, in this light.

> *I like the last shot where she is dancing on the floor, acting out the meanings of the song that she is singing. The meaning of the song is that "when the purple team passed by and stole the drinks of tea that were chilled in the refrigerator. Suddenly, they were dying." In the ad, she pretends that she is dying. This made me recall my childhood and this song on my sports days.*

Furthermore, the slang terms '*Ten (dances) Kra Jay (amusingly or crazily)*' that the little girl used have become another 'talk of the town' among Thai teenagers,

especially my research participants, who also use this term in their everyday lives when they feel amused about something. *Nat*, 17 years old, one of my research participants in the high-school girls group, expresses in this view.

> *I can remember the slang words, as she said* **Kra Jay**. *That is very funny because this is a term we normally use in Teen culture. It is an adverb and means doing something over-the-top. In this context, a little girl dances like crazy as she said she* **Ten** *(dances)* **Kra Jay** *(amusingly or crazily). In everyday lives, my group of friends and I like to use this word to refer to something very amusing or something special. This word became popularly used among Teens overnight.*

These accounts above allow me to consider whether the connections between my research participants' interactions are mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation and by ascertaining the presenter's acting in the Marathon Calling ad: their collective viewings can take part in the creation of meanings (Blumer 1969). In this context, my research participants have discussed the Marathon Calling campaign with respect to non-stop calling or the little girl's long conversation. This is shown in several scenes where the little girl calls her father during his meeting while she is undertaking many other activities at the same time. The scene shows that she is sitting at a dinner table, holding a mobile phone in her hand and talking with her father, and telling him about her sports day. She says, *Daddy, today I went to cheer at the sports day at school. I had a lot of fun. Today I danced like crazy (Ten Kra Jay). Then, I sang a song, too. Uhm... It's not this song...here... this song... or this song...* [etc.]. The next shot reveals that her father is in a meeting with his co-workers but he is listening to his daughter talking. The ad then cuts to a shot of the girl talking, and she continues to talk and sing the sports song. Meanwhile, her father cannot say anything because he is in a meeting. Thus, he is merely nodding his head.

After viewing, most of my research participants can link the theme of this TV ad, the showing-off nature of children, who are very curious and talkative, in this case about a sports day, and the *"Marathon Calling"* campaign, which provides the cheapest rate at the moment. The discussion is pushed forward by *Mo*, one of my research participants in the high-school boys group, who interprets that this campaign suits

people who are talkative and enjoy talking, as well as those who are concerned about their bills because it is a cheap calling rate of just 1.12 Baht per minute. In relation to the long conversions that the little girl makes with her father, my research participants signify the Marathon Calling campaign as a worthwhile campaign because children who do not know how to save money by talking briefly on the mobile phone can use mobile phones to talk freely. Along with the discussion, the fact that the little girl as a symbol of innocence is supported by *Keaw*, one of my research participants in the high-school girls group, who expresses *I think this TV ad wants to show the cheap calling rate promotion. Thus, parents can allow children to use mobile phones. They are not worried about the billing. However, children are still children; they do not know how to use them and I think they are too young to use them.* The way the little girl uses a mobile phone is also connected to nonsense issues, as explained by *Pig*, 21 years old, one of the male university student group who shares that *it shows the way children use mobile phones. They just want to talk without concern about anything. Actually, they are not mature enough to use mobile phones.*

In this regard, most of my research participants interpret the Marathon Calling campaign regarding especially the little girl that she does not know the appropriate manners in terms of using mobile phones in the public and that she is incompetent in using the technology. This point is illustrated in the scene where her father is receiving the incoming call from his daughter during a meeting. Normally, mobile phones are not allowed in meetings, but this convention changes when the father has much authority and can use his phone to receive an incoming call from his daughter, as evident in this TV ad. Thus, the use of mobile phone in the meeting room indicates the social status and the career of her father, who sits in the middle of the meeting. As they put it, people who sit in the middle are signified as having important positions; he might be an executive director or a chairman. This notion means the middle position has significance and power in Thai society. As they maintain, people who are the most important will be invited to sit in the middle position. This is relevant to my research participants' collective actions in their schools and in other situations. This interpretation of the TV ad is made explicit by *Bud*, one of my research participants in the schoolboy group, who notes, *He might be a chairman because he was not considerate of the other people waiting for him.* Additionally, *Dol*, one of my research participants in the female university group, interprets that *actually, her father did not*

want to talk for long because he was in a meeting. But children are the most
important, and are incompetent in using mobile phones.

Seen in this light, the way the little girl used a mobile phone to call her father impacts upon changes in family relationships in the sense that parents and children employ the mobile phone as a transformation of modern communication to enhance the modern lifestyle in the city, to build closer relationships, but also to show the child as incompetent. Thus, my research participants' view that the mobile phone plays a part in being cool and modern has now become involved with children's lifestyles, as shown in the following section through their discussion.

Modern family relationships and interactions through mobile phones

My research participants interacting with this TV ad show their preferred readings of the Marathon Calling campaign that it promotes cheap calling rates by correlating the product with children's lifestyles to demonstrate the freedom to talk on mobile phones without being concerned about the billing. My research displays that this TV ad can be seen to connote that the mobile phone has become part of the lives of children and parents in the contemporary Thai society. The interaction between children and parents in the TV ad can be applied to modern family relationships, as supported by *Dol*, one of my research participants in the female university student group who notes *Parents see their children less than before. Using mobile phones to communicate with each other thus means that they can keep in touch as if they are virtually meeting despite the fact that children may be incompetent in using mobile phones.* A similar view is also provided by *Vee*, one of my research participants in the high-school boys group who shares, *Nowadays, parents don't have much time. Thus, the mobile phone has become an important communicative device to communicate with each other.*

In this sense, the mobile phone can be seen as a device that serves to create and cement family relationships: furthermore, it is used for reducing the gap between parents and children. This engagement allows me to show that my research participants have engaged in the negotiated readings to bring out the decoding of this TV ad in relation to the interaction between family relationships and the mobile

phone. One of my research participants in the female university student group demonstrates this point.

> *It shows the relationship of children and parents. Even though he was in the meeting, he could talk with his daughter because he loved her and cared about her. On the other hand, as it is the nature of children, she wanted to talk about everything that she had encountered that day, especially because it was her sports day. However, children do not know whether the calling rate is cheap or expensive* (Bee, 21 years old, female university student).

The above opinions and the views of various others allow me to explore how mobile phones fit into modern Thai families, which are mostly nuclear families, in relation to the fact that children now have to stay at home alone more than previous generations. An interpretation of this issue is provided by *Kate*, one of my research participants in the schoolgirl group:

> *In the scene, she is provided with a plate of red jelly and a glass of milk as her snack. I think this little girl may come from a rich family. This is because poor children are provided with nothing from parents except dinner. On the other hand, I see she is talking on a mobile phone alone in her house. So, it refers to modern family life in Bangkok where parents cannot spend much of their time with their children because of a lot of work. As many people have said, nowadays parents raise their children through mobile phones.*

These accounts highlight the social changes in the context of modernity in terms of using mobile phones as the family ties to take care of children in Thai society. Furthermore, children have to take care of themselves while they are waiting for their parents to come home, as can be seen in the TV commercial; this relates to many children in general. Thus, parents, especially in Bangkok, tend to incorporate the mobile phone into family interactions in order to bond family relationships although changes may occur in both positive and negative ways, as implied in the TV ad. One

of my research participants in the female university student group makes comments on this topic.

> *This TV ad reveals the issue of the family relationship in two ways. One way is that using mobile phones can tighten close relationships as the little girl calls her father to tell him about her important day. The other way is that if this family is really meant to be a warm family, her father has to attend her sports day rather than the little girl having to use the mobile phone to enhance the family relationship* (Mim, 21 years old, female university student).

According to the negotiated readings, some of my research participants, however, argue that the use of mobile phones to present a cool identity might mislead young people in Thai society. This concern is especially for children, who are naïve, have no responsibility to pay the bill and may not be competent in using mobile phones, in that they might want to express themselves as being cool to others. Furthermore, the mobile phone can be perceived as luxurious technology for children. Comments on this debate are provided by *Bud*, one of my research participants in the high-school boys group who notes, *this little girl goes to kindergarten. The way she uses the mobile phone to call her parents may arouse other children's desires to own mobile phones sooner.* However, his comments encourage other views of his peer group, who discuss the point that mobile phones are now inevitably engaged in young children's lifestyles. *Ton*, who comes from the same group as *Bud*, comments that *I saw young children in the kindergarten nearby my house carry a PCT or a mobile phone in their hands. It made them look as cool as us, I think.* This issue is supported by *Mo*, one of my research participants who says, *my auntie gave a mobile phone to her little niece to contact her during her school time. She leaves her mobile phone with the girl's teacher to prevent her from losing it.* These findings show younger children start to use mobile phones provided by parents when they attend kindergarten in order to socialize and maintain relationships. To elaborate, parents also assume that special reasons are no longer be necessary for a purchase of a mobile phone for a child because they expect the culture to change so that children's mobile phones would be seen as casual everyday appliances (Oksman and Rautiainen 2003:107).

Not only does this analysis allow me to demonstrate that the mobile phone is inserted into family spaces to connect parents and children, but it also provides evidence that the mobile phone being used for family relationships could lead to an incidence that other young children want to use mobile phones to look cool. As *Kate*, one of my research participants, notes, *I have noticed that the mobile phone is currently a craze in kindergarten. When they see friends using mobile phones, they will question why they do not have one.* This quote enables me to further show the oppositional reading in which audiences 'resist' the imposition of a preferred meaning actively reinterpretating media message in contrary (Croteau and Hoynes 2000). This is relevant to *Pig*, one of my research participants in the male university student group, who gives an opinion with respect to his referent framework, stating that young children use mobile phones to fulfil their missing family relationship.

> *This little girl using a mobile phone somehow suggests a broken family. She may be living in another house or with a cousin rather than with her parents. In this TV ad, I see only a little girl living in the house. She is lonely; therefore, she uses a mobile phone to call her father. On the one hand, she can't stand waiting for daddy to come home.*

This connects with Bee's view, another research participant in the female university student group who elaborates on the relationships of parents and children in using mobile phones. As she expresses, *if parents don't pick up the phone, children will have some concerns that their parents are not interested in them. They will grow up with aggressive feelings and manners.* This finding is fitted into the social space of communication between parents and children that they use mobile phones to enhance the family relationship in the modern culture (Claire Lobet-Maris 2003). In this regard, this allows me in the next section to further bring out the interpretations of my research participants through the talks they have about this mobile phone TV ad in connection with their self imaginations of the modern lifestyle.

4). Anytime, anywhere with 'The quality network' from AIS [8]

This section demonstrates the way my research participants interact with the TV commercial advertising the 'quality network' of AIS, which shows the signal

reaching anywhere at any time. This aims at exploring the interrelationships between modern mobile phone technology and their imaginations of modern lifestyles. In examining this issue, I consider how Thai teenagers engage with the images of the TV ad to show the significance of advanced technology and the development of GSM services along with the progression of Thai society. This investigation allows me to look at how the advanced mobile phone technology service is presented as an icon of the new and modern lifestyle, with a comparison between the past and the present.

Alongside the viewing and the discussion, my research participants project this TV commercial as a corporate advertisement which presents a good image of AIS as the quality network in terms of displaying advanced mobile phone technology to enhance people's modern lifestyles. *Keng*, one of my research participants in the female university student group, gives her opinion about the presentation of AIS in the sense that *when I first saw this TV ad, I knew it belonged to AIS because of its look and style. It shows that modern technology and modern life have been connected around us.* Other research participants agree with the statement within the TV ad that the AIS network has continuously developed its advanced network system to be superior to those of other mobile phone providers. That is, it is saying that AIS has positioned itself as the premium brand amongst other brands in terms of stronger and clearer signals and complete coverage in Thailand. In this TV ad, AIS, as the first mobile phone provider to have provided efficient signal network coverage nationwide, claims that in 2540 BE (converted into universal year as *1997)*, they achieved *"the first nationwide signal coverage in Thailand"*. This claim is confirmed in the narration of this TV ad: *"10 years ago, no one believed that one day we could use the mobile phone to connect us with everyone, anywhere."*

Regarding high technology, this TV commercial presents the non-voice text service of AIS in several categories. For example, the M-mobile life service serves M-banking: people can transfer money and conduct transactions via mobile phones without going to the bank directly. The intelligent network with its high-speed technology and unlimited capacity allows people to send huge data files within a few minutes. Alternatively, this TV commercial attempts to convince viewers that mobile phone technology could facilitate the modern lifestyle, making things easier and more convenient, particularly for AIS customers. As the AIS slogan claims *'Anytime*

anywhere', this conception proves the trust of their customers by showing various types of modern mobile phone technology.

This slogan allows me to make a connection between the visual representation of the 'AIS quality network' and the interpretations from the research participants to demonstrate how the mobile phone is a part of modern culture and how it carries symbolic meanings into their everyday lives (du Gay et al. 1997). Thus, my study will investigate how the mobile phone technology conjures up a picture of what 'modernity' is like as a distinctive way of life in this TV commercial. In examining this, I therefore provide interpretations of how my research participants have engaged with the key message of AIS, which aims to show that it is 'the quality network' to connect modern lifestyles with modern mobile phone technology. This engagement is discussed by *Bee*, one of my research participants in the female university student group who interprets the key message of this TV ad in the sense that *now, mobile phones can do everything for us. The spectacular mobile phone technology has made our lives easier and more convenient. It's cool if I can have that in my real life but I'm sure it is expensive.*

Bee's interpretation is related to that of another research participant who notes that the quality network of AIS signalled high technology in everyday lives through AIS non-voice services such as M banking, M cinema and the Internet. These services enhance Thai people's lives (Tee, a 21 year old male student). These accounts are associated with my argument in the sense that Thai teenagers deploy the visual representations of this TV ad as their symbolic resources to present coolness and modernity in relation to the advanced mobile phone technology. Yet, my research participants perceive that these modern technologies cannot be part of their actual lives as a result of their limited means. For example, the scene that shows a yacht sailing signifies a luxurious lifestyle, which is relevant to a comment made by Mim, a female university student. She says "*modern technology is preserved for rich people. So, we have to be rich to have a lifestyle like this*" (Mim, 21 years old, female university student). In the same way, another research participant in the high-school boys group says "*these new services are suitable for businessmen rather than teenagers like us*" (Bird, 17 years old, high school boy).

These comments allow me to show how my research participants connect themselves with this ad by distancing themselves from a particular lifestyle and subsequently this shows the way they understand their status as students. This understanding is provided by *Mo*, one of my research participants in the high-school boys group who notes that *transferring money via M-banking is not necessary for students although using it is seen as cool*. This view is supported by *Dee*, one of my research participants in the male university student group who claims that *we can get new lifestyles by using modern mobile phone technology*.

Up to this point, the cool images of the research participants can be demonstrated through the way they use cool brands as their source of imaginations to express a cool self-image, i.e. wealth, fashion, self-actualisation, chic and hi-technology. Their imaginations concerning hi-tech mobile phones show the way Thai teenagers construct their image of mobile phones, which they consume for their intrinsic pleasure, i.e. sending huge files of data within a few minutes and transferring money via a mobile phone (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998). From this TV ad, the issue of people enhancing the convenience of their lifestyles through mobile phone technology relative to actual life is noted by *Mo*, one of my research participants in the schoolboy group who notes *"if I can use these services in my real life, I can have some more time to do any creations. I will not have to stand in the queue to transfer money and book movie tickets"*. These views allow me to explain my research participants' interpretations of the meanings of the AIS slogan *anytime anywhere* as showing the modern lifestyle of Thai people in Bangkok.

Teens' modern lifestyle

This TV ad attempts to illustrate how the mobile phone has become part of the modern lifestyle in big cities like Bangkok because, from the scene, it can be assumed that the ad is speaking to city people. One of my research participants supports this view: *it can be applied to the activities of people who live in Bangkok. They are likely to spend their leisure time at the cinema or travelling to other provinces near the sea. They want the high technology of mobile phones to help them manage their business and personal matters* (Dee, 21 years old, male university student).

This comment allows me to explore the connection between the connotative and the denotative meanings and how the three readings, i.e. preferred, negotiated and oppositional, of my research participants have intertwined through this TV commercial. In this context, the preferred reading illustrates that advanced mobile phone technology facilitates modern lifestyles. In addition, the efficiency of the AIS network allows people to carry out services via their mobile phones, such as downloading huge files, M-banking and booking movie tickets. This observation enables me to look at the negotiated reading of my research participants which is provided by *Champ*, one of my research participants in the male university student group. As he puts it, *This TV ad shows me how far modern technology has come. It would be good if my life could be like the TV ad. It looks cool and modern.* This quote is related to the view of *Nid*, one of my research participants in the schoolgirl group who notes that *the modern mobile phone technology, M-banking, gives me more free time. It saves me from wasting my time in long queues at the bank.*

My research suggests that although modern mobile phone technology can facilitate people's lifestyles, my research participants could not actually use various categories of such modern technology. It is because they perceive that these modern technologies are expensive services and more luxurious than their means allow, as noted above. The oppositional readings toward the image of corporate advertising that can be seen as an overstatement to general customers is provided by *Bird*, one of my research participants in the schoolboy group. He says, *in my daily life, I just make calls and send text messages.* This observation is relevant to another view of a female university student who has some doubt about the M-banking services. As she argues, *I don't believe in M-banking. The main targets of this service should be businessmen rather than teenagers. For example, to use M-banking, you need to have much money to transfer. But if I had money to transfer, I would go to the bank myself. It's more secure* (Mod, 21 years old, female university student).

Paradoxically, my research suggests that modern mobile phone technology helps people to live more convenient and more modern lives. Nonetheless, some of my research participants argue that face-to-face interactions seem to become less and less common because human interactions are being replaced by mobile phone interactions. These oppositional ideas make it possible for me to demonstrate my research

participants' interpretations of this TV ad. Most of my research participants in the schoolboy and schoolgirl groups comment on this view that *modern technology has reduced two-way communication between people. People may be lazier. For example, movie ticket booking can replace social interactions between the seller and the audience* (Bud, 17 years old, high-school boy). In addition, *Vee*, another schoolboy, elaborates this point: *In the future, there might be no interactions between people. There will just be interactions between people and their mobile phones.* These views enhance my analysis in the sense that the mobile phone becomes an ideal instrument of two-way interpersonal communication to modify the establishment of communication patterns (Katz and Aakhus 2002). More specifically, mobile communication has changed the way people conduct their lives and relationships. This idea also captures the sense in which the mobile phone is at the perceptual forefront of technologically driven change, in particular the lavish lifestyles of the new rich middle class in relation to the ownership of mobile phones (Robinson and Goodman 1996).

This material allows me to show the drawbacks of mobile phone technology and how they may impact on Thai society. *Kate*, a schoolgirl, expresses the same view. As she puts it, *People will be more distant because they will think that they can use mobile phones to contact each other. They might think there is actually no need to meet* (Kate, 18 years old, high-school girl). However, her interpretation through negotiated reading shows that talking on mobile phones can replace the intimate relationships that enhance the new communicative patterns through high technologies, i.e. digital phones and video phones. In fact, for instance, meetings might be necessary for Thai teenagers to take courtship to its conclusion, and necessary to go beyond a particular functional point of communication.

Furthermore, an oppositional reading in the sense that the modern technology might paralyse people is provided by *Pig*, one of my research participants in the male university student group who states *"if people use modern technology too much, they will lack encouragement in their lives because they will see everything as too easy"*. To support this point, the issue of compatible technology is supported by *Neng*, one of my research participants in the male university student group, who notes *The mobile phone handset has to have the functions to perform various special services to*

support this, for example the GPRS function and Bluetooth wireless. If I have these functions but my friend's handset does not, they can't work together. This indicates the status of the technology.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates Thai teenagers' interpretations of advertising discourse alongside advertising representations that reflect their modernity in terms of expressing their cool and modern selves relative to talking about TV ads. My research concludes that the visual representations presented through mobile phone TV commercials are influential factors for Thai teenagers, stimulating cross-cultural interaction, intensifying the negotiation of cultural identities and encouraging the expression of modernity with regard to cultural changes vis-à-vis the mobile phone. The four mobile phone TV commercials represent a certain notion of modernity. That is, they use popular cultural forms, displayed through brand images and people's everyday experiences with them, to transmit social and cultural changes amongst Thai teenagers. For example, the advertisements demonstrate the modern courtship of Teen and Tween subcultures and the nuclear family in which mobile phones have become part.

In this context, my focus group research suggests that Thai teenagers talk about images displayed in TV commercials with regard to the advertising copy, presenters, costumes, settings and props to show how these elements have become the talk of the town. Additionally, the research shows the visual analysis of Thai teenagers in terms of their interpretations of the index, symbols and icons on the basis of their referent system, which vary with educational background. My research has found that Thai teenagers deploy the meanings of advertising context, which connote their modern lifestyles and their images of the ideal way of living, as their symbolic resources to express their cool images. In this regard, my research has demonstrated that advertising representations can be seen as forms of entertainment and means of expression about modernity, which are embedded into Thai teenagers' leisure activities at home and at school, and may be influential amongst friends through advertising discourse.

Notes

[1] In 'Encoding/Decoding', Hall (1980) proposes a model to explain the process of encoding and decoding in illustrating the TV programme as "meaningful discourse" and then as "meaningfully decoded". He also indicates that production and reception of meanings are not identical, but related. In other words, meanings are not in the text, but they are decoded by the receiver. Put differently, the ability of an image to be interpreted in such divergent ways means that people have to be careful in assuming that images have fixed meanings or ideological effects. Many images will mean different things to different people. Simply put, the meaning of the producer as an encoder is different from the meaning of the audience as a decoder. The interpretative message also depends on the "maps of meaning and map of social reality".

[2] David Morley (1980) conducted 29 focus groups with people from similar classes, ethnic backgrounds, educational levels, occupations and sexes, who viewed videotapes of national programmes from the BBC in order to investigate the relationship between "text" and "receiver". The hypothesis of this study argued that viewers from similar groups should interpret/respond to the message from this programme by sharing a cultural orientation towards decoding messages in particular ways. As can be seen, Morley (1980) drew on Hall's theory of encoding/decoding to ground his study in order to study the viewers' interpretations. By the same token, the Hall's encoding/decoding process and Morley's focus group have also strongly influenced my study of audience reception.

[3] To get a sense of this, Hall (1980) identifies three hypothetical positions that deconstruct the common sense meaning of misunderstanding in terms of a theory of systematically distorted communication: (1) A dominant code or preferred reading: the viewer interprets within the 'dominant code' and reads the preferred meaning, which has been encoded 'full and straight'; (2) A negotiated reading, or an ideological practice acknowledging the legitimacy of the dominant codes but adapting the reading to the specific condition of the interpreter; and (3) An oppositional code, or an ideological practice running entirely against the dominant but favouring the dominated individuals.

[4] As Bignell (2002:15) argues, "certain signs have mixed symbolic, indexical and iconic features. For instance, a traffic light showing red has both indexical and symbolic components. Firstly, a symbol is arbitrarily linked to its object by means of an association of ideas or habitual connection. Secondly, an icon is a sign that conveys an idea by virtue of its very close reproduction of the actual object or event, for instance realistic images, graphs, diagrams and maps. Resemblance, then, is the basic of iconity. Lastly, an index sign is an unmotivated sign. It is established as a sign in the mind of the interpretant through experience or pragmatic understanding of the material world (Innis 1985)."

[5] The calling melody was the latest non-voice service from GSM Evolution, AIS, which was advertised at the beginning of 2004. See the TVC storyboard and the content in Appendix 5.

[6] This TV commercial belongs to DTAC, another mobile phone provider, which is a strong competitor of AIS. The key message of this TV ad is intended to promote the new cheap top-up cards for the pre-paid Happy Dprompt service, which cost 50 Baht during this campaign. See the TVC storyboard and the TV content in Appendix 5.

[7] During my fieldwork, GSM 1800, one of the mobile phone providers, launched the "Marathon Calling" campaign, in which GSM 1800 subscribers were able to call at a cheap rate of just 1.12 Baht per minute. See the TVC storyboard and the TV content in Appendix 5.

[8] AIS launched this TV commercial to ensure and guarantee the quality of their network in order to maintain their customers' brand loyalty. See the TVC storyboard and the TV content in Appendix 5.

Conclusion

The thesis has explored social interactions of Thai middle class teenagers vis-à-vis their mobile phones in different social and cultural settings in a single urban centre, Bangkok, Thailand. The research demonstrated that Thai middle class teenagers employed mobile phones as a representation of modernity to provide for their new expression of identities and changing forms of communicative patterns and social relationships. It had brought together the study of Tween and Teen subcultures who studied in private and public schools, as well as university students, and had examined the ways in which they had incorporated mobile phone technologies such as digital camera phones, video phones and Internet phones into their everyday lives and their leisure activities. Furthermore, cool culture was studied in terms of using cool brands to express their cool selves, with variations in relation to expensive brands and new models of mobile phone handsets. Also, interpretations of representations in TV commercials were examined to demonstrate the way Thai teenagers created and reassessed their cultural identities in the contexts of local and global interactions. This further provided the understanding of their relationships to brand images and their interactions and experiences in relation to mobile phones as part of a mobile phone sub-culture.

My ethnographic research was based on various approaches including in-depth interviews, participant observations, focus group discussions and ethnographic film. This study considered how Tween and Teen subcultures, i.e. schoolboys and girls, as well as male and female university students, served as cultural intermediaries in expending the new experience of the globe: this was where they consumed global brands, in particular mobile phones, and played with modernity in different cultural settings. Some of them had formed new identities in terms of *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* subcultures in relation to the mobile phone interactions, which had brought about cultural changes and shifts in Thai social values in various ways. The material allowed me to provide a connection between the habitus – cultural activities which can be seen in their actions, their choices and tastes through the modern lifestyles and leisure, and consumerist values, in terms of choosing cool brands and the over-consumption of mobile phone handsets among Thai middle class teenagers. The

research showed that mobile phones could be used to indicate social status and as a means of seeking pleasures.

The research had suggested that the meanings of mobile phones could be seen to be related to their symbolic functions rather than just tools of connectivity amongst the Tween and Teen subcultures. They generated differential forms of modernity in terms of being cool and modern in relation to the problematic meanings of mobile phones. The research had demonstrated that the meanings of mobile phone as the necessity-luxury and the fashion as a symbol of modernity were now collapsing in terms of the moral judgements of Thai teenagers. This was influenced by advertising images and social emulations in the peer group, which was related to the construction of new values and new meanings. For example, luxurious mobile phones could be used to accomplish Thai teenagers' needs and desires in terms of marking their social status and communicating their positions in the social world, as well as maintaining their social relations within a peer group. In this sense, the mobile phone, as a particular form of modernity, provided a particular symbol of wealth, fashion, self-actualisation, chic and high technology.

Thus, the three key arguments of this thesis were firstly to present an understanding of how the idea of modernity frames Thai teenagers' lifestyles and leisure, as well as how the transformations of mobile phone technology, i.e. the digital camera phone, video phone and internet phone, had been widely adopted amongst Thai middle class teenagers. In this sense, the mobile phone as a particular form of modernity was embedded as a new form of communication and a new meaning of self-identity. Secondly, the image of the mobile phone in TV commercials represented "modernity" using popular cultural forms displayed through brand images and people's everyday experiences with them. These brand images transmitted social and cultural changes to Thai middle class teenagers in terms of creating cultural identities of being cool and modern. In this sense, the new expression of youth could be elaborated on the *Gig* and the *Deck Neaw* subcultures which had emerged in the contemporary Thai culture in the 21st century. My research displayed how Thai teenagers creatively and expressively acted through forms of deviant behaviours within this subculture.

It investigated how Thai teenagers had interacted with brand images in advertising representations that became important factors in encouraging the intensive mobile communicative phenomenon and the over-consumption of the mobile phone in Thai society. It revealed how the various meanings of mobile phones were generated through social emulations and fashion through the representations used in advertising ideology. Thirdly, the teenagers were key players within the local processes of globalisation in terms of consuming global brands in local settings. They encompassed mobile phones as a way of seeking pleasure in their leisure activities at home, school and department stores.

Therefore, the thesis, based on cultural and social studies, media anthropology and media communication studies, had brought out the connections of how Thai teenagers, referred to as Tween and Teen, had social interactions with their mobile phones in their everyday lives. These interactions showed their expression of modernity and their various constructions of meanings in order to form their new identities in the context of globalisation. Furthermore, Thai teenagers had engaged in the newness of mobile phone experiences that had altered their communicative patterns. These theoretical frameworks presented wide-ranging investigations and reflections on the notion of mobile phone culture and the everyday lives of Thai teenagers in modern society. Here, I will summarise some of my key findings and suggest possible implementations and limitations for the future research.

Thai middle class teenagers / Globalisation and localisation

In my study, Thai teenagers acted as cultural intermediaries within the local process of globalisation in terms of displaying particular ideas of modernity by using global brands of mobile phone handsets in private and public settings. My research displayed that Thai middle class teenagers of varied ethnicity, i.e. Sino-Thai and full Thai blood, and classes, i.e. new rich middle class and median middle class, had generated their consumerist values, which transcended the cultivation of their parents, in relation to mobile phone consumption. This emergence of consumerist tendencies and materialism as core values had played a significant part in transformation of modernity in the consumer culture, which was particularly evident in the new rich Thai middle class (see Chapter 2).

My research illustrated that Sino-Thai teenagers had adopted novel fashions of cool brands and consumed trendy mobile phones by emulating their parents in order to maintain their position of superiority through the display of wealth. On the other hand, teenagers of full Thai blood, who were perceived as poorer, had formed conspicuous consumption patterns in terms of admiring other people's wealth and imitating Sino-Thai teenagers' lifestyles by purchasing the same products that they used although they had to be in debt. In this context, the research further displayed that mobile phone use, as a local form of appropriation to accommodate young people's social interactions in the context of modernity, was embedded in the syncretic religion, social norms and beliefs, as demonstrated in holy places such as Pra Trimurati and Pra Prom Erawan. That is, mobile phone behaviours were based on the attitudes and beliefs of Thai teenagers, which were grounded in Thai custom and culture.

Bangkok: a place of image representation

With regard to the local and global interactions, I had shown that a sense of 'modernity' had transformed the city of Bangkok into a local site that presented the power of mobile communications and the characteristics of urban lifestyles, which were regarded as necessary in Thai teenagers' everyday lives. To illustrate, the urban experiences of Thai teenagers were inextricably bound up with the mobile phone which was a representation of modernity in terms of its symbolic and connective functions. In Bangkok, the mobile phone symbolised a process of modernization in terms of communicative transformations and the adoption of technologies and western values, which had an impact on the way Thai teenagers lived. The features of modernity in Bangkok were full of references to vivid mobile phone advertisements, images, signs and ring tone variations, all of which articulated new relationships in terms of the virtual communicative patterns of Thai teenagers in various local settings, such as homes, schools and department stores. Additionally, Thai teenagers used their mobile phones to enhance their visible forms and promote the degree of time-space distanciation, as well as shaping the boundaries of private and public spaces.

In this respect, the cultural transformations alongside the representation of modernity could be displayed through the mobile phone interaction in different social settings. For example, department stores could be regarded as ritual places that exhibited the idea of modernity through the representation of images and shop displays where Thai teenagers were likely to hang around and gather ideas of modernity – being cool and modern. Schools had become an important setting at which mobile phones served as a form of symbolic creativity, i.e. downloading ring tones and sending SMS and MMS, rather than a communicative function. Meanwhile, homes had become places of virtual communication as families used mobile phones to connect with each other in the modern city. Mobile phones could be seen as making relationships closer and providing security within the Thai family (see Chapter 3 for more details).

The modernity of mobile phone technology

In Bangkok, Thai teenagers presented the newness of mobile phones, associated with the progressive generations of mobile phone technology from 1st generation to 3rd generation. Accordingly, this research had adopted the Social Shaping of Technology (SST) approach to examine the idea of modernity as part of interactions by showing how the active choices of new mobile phone technology among Thai teenagers had shaped social implications and were patterned by the conditions of their creation and use. To elaborate, Thai teenagers incorporated new technologies, i.e. MMS technology, digital camera mobile phones, Internet and WAP applications, to enhance their intimacy and to create a sense that they were cool and modern. This provided for the understanding of various forms of social interactions, i.e. face-to-mobile phone face, mediated and quasi-mediated communication, in modern society with regard to changing communicative patterns. In this sense, Thai teenagers followed up the high technology of mobile phones that helped facilitate their convenient lifestyles and enhance intimacy in the way in which they perceived that mobile phones could replace face-to-face communication. Furthermore, third-generation mobile phones could be understood as entertainment communicative devices, which were relevant to the mediated and quasi-mediated communications (see Chapter 4 for more details).

In terms of the innovation adoption process, Thai children generally began by using PCT (Personal Communication Telephones) as their first step with communicative

devices. Then, when they had more responsibility or were more mature, new mobile phones were bought for them as rewards for good behaviours and good grades. Thereafter, the old ones, which were considered an obsolete technology, were passed on to other family members, either younger siblings or older people who lacked technological knowledge. At the time of study, the types of mobile phone that were popular among Thai teenagers had colour screens, photo functions, games and FM stereos, with fashionable designs. Some Thai teenagers had two SIM cards for different systems, which provided different promotions, for example, using the GSM system of AIS to receive signals and incoming calls while using pre-paid DTAC to make calls as a result of this service's cheap air-time rates. Besides the modern features of mobile phones, Thai teenagers adopted mobile phones as a new experience to intimacy rather than merely as tools of connectivity that was illustrated alongside the different generations of mobile phone technologies (see more detail in Chapter 4).

Accordingly, my research provided an understanding of how the modernity of mobile phone technologies was involved with the Thai context to show which aspects of the communicative patterns of Thai teenagers would remain and which would change. To elaborate on this, mobile phones still retained the connectivity function on the one hand. On the other hand, the aspect of communicative patterns would change in such a way that Thai teenagers used their mobile phones as a means of self-expression. As my research demonstrated, Thai teenagers constructed a new form of parasocial interaction through the mobile phone where they enjoyed "intimate relations" with people they might never talk to personally (see Murdock 1993), a behaviour which could be illustrated by the discussion of the *Gig* culture in chapter 6.

Generating the meanings of mobile phone

With regard to the generations of mobile phone technology, the research therefore presented different views of the meanings of mobile phones in terms of missed calls, the technology of necessity and luxuries, the technology of fashion as a symbol of modernity, as well as the throwaway technology amongst Thai teenagers. My findings showed that Thai teenagers associated missed calls specifically with various meanings, such as *missing you, take care* and *worrying*, as well as *I has already arrived* or *Pick me up*. These revealed intimate connections. As I had observed in the

specific Thai context, the culture of shooting missed calls could be regarded as a kind of game that reflected close personal relationships among friends. In this sense, it also signified a sense of coolness and popularity – a trick that friends were likely to play (see more detail in chapter 5).

With regard to the technology of necessity and luxury, the research displayed that Thai teenagers could not differentiate the meanings of mobile phones as a necessity from the aspects of luxury and fashion, which were symbols of modernity. Most Thai teenagers were likely to see their mobile phones as luxurious technology that made their personalities look more modern and cooler even if they did not know how to use or operate all the functions provided by their mobile phones. New and second-hand mobile phone handsets might be regarded to play a role in the distinction of communication and the establishment of identity, as well as maintaining Thai teenagers' social status among their peer groups. In this regard, the research showed that fashionable mobile phones had been viewed as a means of new expression forms of identity in modern culture.

Meanwhile, it showed that parents connoted mobile phones as throwaway technology. In this sense, old or outdated mobile phone handsets would be accumulated as trash at home. The discarded mobile phone could then be seen as useless and worthless because it was out of fashion and not cool, in contrast to the meanings mentioned above. Thus, the research demonstrated that the meanings of mobile phone were interpreted in different ways: as symbols of modernity and communicative devices, relationship ties and fashion items. Furthermore, most Thai teenagers regarded mobile phones as a new source of intimacy that they found ways to cement family ties and connections with friends.

Tween and Teen subculture: Gig and Deck Neaw, new expression of youth

As I had argued for *Gig and Deck Neaw*, new expressions of youth with regard to the representation of modernity through the various meanings of mobile phones, my research demonstrated the ways in which Thai teenagers created their cultural identities within the subcultures of Tweens and Teens. This engagement had been demonstrated through individual lifestyles and leisure activities as a feature of

modernity. It revealed social structures and individual actions and referred to the embodiment in individual actors of systems of social norms, understandings and patterns of behaviour: the so-called habitus (see Bourdieu 1984). I drew upon the concept of habitus to illustrate the *Gig* and the *Deck Neaw* subcultures as cultural transformations used to present new forms of identities and lifestyles with an influence of mobile phones in Thai teenagers' lives.

To elaborate, the *Gig* and the *Deck Neaw* subcultures could indicate the emergence of new identities, characterised by fashion and deviant behaviours to be a resistance to authoritative Thai traditional norm. The *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* subcultures had become cultural spaces where Thai teenagers freely expressed the idea of modernity by dressing, thinking, acting and using the mobile phone technology which was seen to be cool and modern among friends. In specific Thai context, the term *Gig* referred to a person who had freedom in love and could date anyone, with no commitment. Thai teenagers adopted the *Gig* culture to present their cool identity in terms of having more freedom in the modern culture. The *Gig* subculture could be associated with mobile phones in the sense that Thai teenagers changed models of their mobile phone handsets in the same way as they changed their *Gigs*. Furthermore, Thai teenagers used their mobile phones to store their *Gigs'* mobile phone numbers and pictures.

Meanwhile, the *Deck Neaw* subculture related to people who were crazy about technology, representing the modern or cool culture through fashion, accessories and high technology of mobile phone. They expressed their cool identities through the models of mobile phones that they used. Fashionable, high-tech mobile phones became important factors in confirming their status as cool, modern, chic and wealthy. Therefore, the research revealed that mobile phones were signifying practices in terms of generating meanings that produced and reproduced cultural groups, as well as referring to Tween and Teen subcultures alongside their positions of relative power and new expression of identity, such as the *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* subcultures (see Chapter 6 for more details).

Cool culture at school

In this regard, Thai teenagers' tastes and styles of mobile phone use had interacted around cool brands and social patterns, which could be demonstrated in the cool culture at school. My argument was that the cool culture, which was the culture of using brand names that subsequently presented the modernity of the user, created social competition and manipulated social emulations amongst peer groups, who were different depending on their school types. This investigation provided an understanding of the way in which Thai teenagers used cool brands as symbolic resources to frame the cool identity of selves, personality and social emulation within the peer group. In this regard, two examples, AIS and DTAC, were used to illustrate the cool culture in terms of choosing cool mobile phone networks that were relevant to Thai teenagers' personalities and their interpretation of symbolic interactions. With regard to their logos, Thai teenagers perceived the AIS logo as indicating a premium brand with reference to professional communication, anytime, anywhere. That was relevant to their social status as luxurious and wealthy. Meanwhile, the DTAC logo was perceived as indicating an accessible network that was available for everyone and a friendly network that made communication easy. That was related to their images as friendly and *economical people*.

The research found that in terms of using cool brands, Thai teenagers were as concerned about brand image, conveyed through visual images, logos and slogans, as they were about their experiences of the prices of brands. My research depicted how brand images were communicated through product attributes or benefits by associating certain highly valued feelings with the brand. The research demonstrated that cool brands could acquire deep meanings in Thai teenagers through their involvements in the socialisation process. This was illustrated through the relationships between brand imagination and Thai teenagers' imagination towards their experience of use. In this regard, talking on the mobile phone could also be regarded as a symbolic resource through which Thai teenagers maintained stories about themselves. Put another way, although the mobile phone was seen as part of people's gossip on the one hand, it substituted long-distance communication for face-to-face contact on the other (see Chapter 7 for more details).

Expression of modernity through TV ad

With regard to the socialisation process, the research demonstrated how Thai teenagers employed advertising, which played a key role in communicating brand images, as their sources of identity and perceptions of brands. Thus, the research displayed how Thai teenagers negotiated and perceived the meanings of advertisement, which reflected the idea of modernity in terms of associating with their slice of lives. In this context, the semiotic examination of four mobile phone TV commercials as symbolic resources demonstrated the expression of modernity, which transmitted social and cultural changes amongst Thai teenagers. Materials gathered from four focus group discussions showed cultural membership, tastes and preferences with regard to mobile phones through evidence of selective exposure, selective perception and selective retention amongst Thai teenagers in relation to the four mobile phone commercials. My materials illustrated the levels of denotation and connotation found among Thai teenagers in relation to visual and film technique analyses, with variations by gender and level of education.

The research discovered that Thai teenagers' interpretations of the idea of modernity alongside their encoding and decoding process were associated with their social backgrounds and social situations. This finding allowed me to provide an understanding of Thai teenagers' negotiated and oppositional readings in relation to the preferred reading of advertising messages. In this context, most Thai teenagers liked TV commercials that had a sense of humour and captured their modern lifestyles, i.e. courtship and popular songs, rather than the boring detailed presentation in corporate advertisements. My research found that Thai teenagers emulated advertising representations that presented creative ideas, a slice of life and modern lifestyles that were associated with their imaginations of the ideal way of living. This became a symbolic resource as Thai teenagers constructed new meanings of identity in modern culture.

Key Relevant Literature reviews

My work has been engaged with the paradigm of other scholars i.e. Gillespie (1995), Bourdieu (1987), Appardurai (1996), Thompson (1995) and Miller and Horst

(2006) in terms of ethnicity, habitus, modernity, social interactions, media anthropology and ethnographic research as respectively that provided the significant frame within my enquiry. My work has built on these literatures in terms of conceptual ideas, research questions and research methodologies.

First of all, Gillespie (1995) has exerted an influence on my work in terms of exploring the role of television in the formation and transformation of identity among young Punjabi Londoners. She considers how young people's identities are both formed and transformed by their location in history, ethnicity, language and culture. Furthermore, they are also constructing new forms of identity through their material and cultural consumption and production. In this sense, her ethnography examines the way in which TV and video are used in diasporic families, both to maintain and remake and to challenge and revise cultural traditions. In doing so, she explores the young people's reading of the representations of India current in both Hindi and 'western' film and TV (Gillespie 1995:23). My ethnography took forward Gillespie's work by considering how mobile phone TV commercials have been engaged with the idea of modernity regarding to the mobile phone use among Thai teenagers and how they talk about TV ads as symbolic resources of identity to form their identities. This framework extended my finding in terms of ethnicity i.e. Sino-Thais and full Thai blood used mobile phones to show their social status, as well as, gender relationships through mobile phone interactions in the context of consumerism and media reception. In examining Thai teenagers' receptions as active audiences, Tween, Teen and the university students differently decoded and negotiated the idea of modernity in terms of using cool mobile phones by referring mobile phone TV commercials as their cultural resources.

In stark contrast, my investigation on the expression of modernity which Thai middle class teenagers present themselves as cool and modern can be reflective of the significance of important changes in social norms and cultural values through the symbolic meanings of mobile phones within the Tween and Teen subcultures in modern culture. According to this, they brought about the cultural changes in society that associated with the new expression of youth identity as *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* who incorporated mobile phone as part of their identities.

The expression of modernity through mobile phones can be regarded to Appardurai (1996)'s work in the sense that Thai teenagers consumed the mobile phone as global brands within the localisation trends and flows. In specifically, the global and local interactions are illustrated through certain modern transformations that have bound up with advanced communication technologies such as the mobile phone, the shopping centre and the modern public transportation in Bangkok. There have influenced the leisure and lifestyles of Thai teenagers in a modern society. For instance, Thai teenagers deconstructed various meanings of mobile phones in Thai contexts as intimacy and symbol of fashion rather than a tool of communication. Thai teenagers perceived the out-of-date mobile phones as a throwaway technology which is accumulated at homes as electronic debris.

Furthermore, I elaborated class distinctions of Bourdieu (1987) and the conspicuous consumption of Veblen (1994) that related to Thai teenagers' ethnicity, class and religion in order to demonstrate the value of consumerism and materialism in Thai society from past to present. In Bourdieu (1987)'s work, I applied the habitus as a set of cultural activities that differentiate people by their lifestyles or a system of socially learned cultural predispositions to my work in the way that Thai teenagers have habitued practices with their mobile phones through their set of experiences, knowledge, norm and their routine lives. This becomes the main framework to examine the mobile phone culture in Bangkok. My contribution showed that family and peer group can be seen as a reference to cultivate the conspicuous consumption for both Sino Thais and full Thai bloods. Even though full Thai bloods appeared to have more economical values than Sino Thais, they could not bear the purchase of the fashionable mobile phones following their peer groups and fashion. The department stores, schools and homes have become the sites through which new forms of identities deconstructed.

According to Thompson (1995)'s work on the mediated and quasi-mediated interactions, my contribution illustrated that Thai teenagers have engaged in the succession of new changes in the mobile phone technology into their everyday lives and relationships. Thai teenagers altered their communicative patterns from face-to-face as a traditional pattern, to the face-to- the mobile phone-face as a modern and cool expression (Katz and Aakhus 2003). In particular, Thai girls used SMS, MMS

and video clip function as both mediated and quasi-mediated interactions to lessen their embarrassments when courting boys. As well as this, the class distinctions between Sino Thais and full Thai bloods have related to the interaction between the personal appeal and the ideological power of consumerism in cultural transformations in the context of modernity in Bangkok.

The global literature reviews (Katz and Aakhus 2003; Sheryl Han Sze Tjong, Weber and Sternberg 2003; Leung and Wei 2000) showed the fact that the study of mobile phone in other countries are relevant to my study in terms of how deeply the mobile phone affects Thai cultural and social patterns. Furthermore, the study of cell phone in Jamaica as the recent work of Miller and Horst (2006) has paralleled to my work in terms of exploring how low incomes of Jamaicans used the cell phone to establish a pattern of extensive rather than intensive networks as they called their link-up. The extensive networks mean the church, the workplace and the kinship relationship; on the other hand, the intensive networks mean the family relationship and personal matters. Furthermore, link-up usage highlighted the importance of understanding the local incorporation of cell phones as well as local forms of networking enacted through new communication technologies.

Their contribution reveals that the central role of communication in helping low-income households cope with poverty for example the use of cell phone to extend and create business, as well as, using the phone to locate jobs and widen their search for employment with regard to the bill payments and the micro economy. However, I added in a particular way to this work by looking at how urban Thai middle class teenagers see the mobile phone as a status symbol and as a potential trend-setter with which Thai teenagers find ways to signal their exclusivity as being cool and modern to others. The affordability of fashionable and expensive mobile phones have become a debate issue between family and Thai teenagers in relation to the issues of moral economy in class distinctions between, for example, the newly rich middle class and the median middle class.

Research Implementations, Limitations and Future Implications

In light of the findings mentioned above, I therefore began by highlighting the three central themes of my study according to implementations, limitations and future implications based on cultural and media studies, media communication and media anthropology. The first theme here had to do with the global and local nexus: the way in which Thai teenagers served as cultural intermediaries who extended new communication technology as the mobile phone interceded and became part of their everyday lives, in addition to consuming global brands of mobile phones in their local settings. As the review of mobile phone literature in various countries, my research demonstrated the position of the mobile phone as a representation of modernity, which Thai middle class teenagers (Sino-Thais and full Thai blood) incorporated to express their cool identities of self. In this context, it revealed their consumerist tendency and domestic consumption in a distinct way in which full Thai bloods emulated tastes and lavish lifestyles of Sino-Thai to search for their cool identities.

Furthermore, this theme provided a deeper understanding of the mobile phone subcultures in Tween and Teen in the Thai context. My research demonstrated that the mobile phone could be regarded as an electronic material culture that became part of modernity in relation to cultural changes, which had been examined in relation to the *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* cultures. These subcultures presented the deviant behaviours of Thai teenagers corresponding to mobile phone interactions that fashioned their cool identities. More specifically, the research examined cultural signifying practices involving symbolic representations that were embedded in the process of symbolic creativity and meaning-making. To elaborate, the mobile phone could be seen as an indicator of social status and a means of seeking pleasure among Thai teenagers in Thai society. Similar to the analysis of mobile phone literature (Katz, and Aakhus 2002) as people create various forms of mobile phone communication, my finding showed the distinctions between the way in which Thai teenagers expressed their modernity as being cool and modern and their intimacy through mobile phones according to the generation of mobile phone technology in their localities.

The implementation of this theme attempts to explain that Tween and Teen subculture vis-à-vis mobile phone interactions has been part of the expression of modernity

through the current technological and cultural changes in Thai society. My research suggests that the mobile phone culture has become the common culture in Thai society. That is, most Thai teenagers are actually full of expressions of mobile phones, such as signs and symbols. Also, individuals and groups seek to creatively establish their presence, identity and the meanings associated with them (see Willis 1990). More specifically, it can be elaborated on the *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* subcultures, which depict the emergence of new expression of youth identities, which can be seen as the flow of modernity that has become the collective identities among Thai teenagers in the sense that they use their mobile phones as an aspect of asserting themselves in the new experiences.

However, on reflection, my research did not include a substantial sample of Thai teenagers in rural settings. This investigation might have led to more distinct contradictions between global and local interaction in the macro perspective. This is because most of Thai teenagers in rural settings have less education, less media exposure and are assumed to be stuck with their own identity and less subject to changes when compared with Thai teenagers in urban settings who have much more complex behaviours (see Suphatra Suphap 2000; Chalearmpol Som-Inn 2004). This becomes a limitation in that the new subcultures, *Gig* and *Deck Neaw* subcultures, discussed in this study, cannot be generalised to the youth culture of the nation in terms of their specific own terms and small-scaled study.

The second theme dealt with the issue of modern mobile phone technology; this research explored the time frame from the 1st generation to the 3rd generation of mobile phone technology. Within the time frame selected, mobile phone technology itself had undergone continuous growth and development along with the mainstream of fashion. Therefore, the limitations of this study were not mentioned in technical terms or in the context of the production of mobile phone technology. This is why this study cannot provide a deep understanding of mobile phone technology from a technological determinist's argument. Rather, it only addressed the outcomes or 'impacts' of technological changes and the determination of people use. On the other hand, the emphasis of this study is simply to review the relationship between the generation of mobile phone technology and human interactions as an example of cultural transformation and a cultural innovation. Accordingly, the Social Shaping of

Technology approach (SST) as part of modern interaction was adopted in this study, which aimed to explore aspects of modernity in the context of cultural changes in which Thai teenagers had their own choices to choose mobile phone technology to facilitate their modern lifestyle.

Thus, the implementation of this theme could be elaborated in the context of cultural consumption and cultural industry. That is, my contribution had demonstrated that different groups of Thai teenagers tended to have different tastes and different mobile phone uses for various purposes in different social contexts, all of which could be described as habitus. The concept of habitus operating as a system of dispositions or habitual action both recognized and unrecognized by Thai teenagers and forming the basis for action in the social world (Wynne 1998; Bourdieu 1984) was elaborated here in terms of the cultural activities and the interaction through mobile phones. This knowledge provided guidelines for an ethnographic analysis that allowed me to show how individual lifestyles embedded in the mobile phone in everyday lives. This was to emphasise how they classified their interactions through mobile phones within social spaces i.e., home, department store and school and how they were classified by others in the society.

In sum, Thai teenagers created their cultural tastes and were socially shaped by social emulations among their peer groups. My research suggested that the mobile phone culture in Thai teenagers' subcultures underscored a moral economic perspective on choices concerning mobile phone usage and pleasure seeking. The mobile phone could be understood as marking class distinctions in terms of the culture of leisure. In other words, the mobile phone artifact played key roles in framing ritual activities, as could be seen in the culture of shooting missed calls discussed in chapter 5 (Miller 1985).

Last but not least, my research had focused on the theme of conducting an ethnographic research in the Thai context so as to develop and add to the anthropology of media studies in Thai society: particularly in the urban settings where there were more complexity and diversity than in rural settings. In this context, my empirical data had drawn upon an ethnographic research as a method of cultural investigation and as the basis for implementing the study of social and cultural

changes and revealing everyday life on account of modernity, particularly of Thai middle class teenagers in Bangkok, Thailand. By doing this, however, I had encountered some limitations in terms of selecting the research area in that Bangkok is such a large area. Although I had used the purposive technique to narrow down the scope in terms of observing people in their everyday lives, I encountered problems about not gaining the trust of Thai teenagers who were aware of my presence as a stranger. This problem perhaps made me lack the sources of observed information from participants in the Tween girls' group and thus hindered the acquisition of particular knowledge of mobile phone interactions through personal immersion.

In terms of conducting ethnographic research, the strength of my thesis showed the interdisciplinary approaches by looking at the mobile phone culture in Bangkok, Thailand through the subculture of Tweens and Teens who used mobile phones as the representation of modernity. This finding could be used more extensively to further reveal the insight into mobile phone interaction in urban Thai middle class teenagers vis-à-vis local and global cultures. Furthermore, I suggest that virtual ethnography appears to be an interesting implication in order to catch up with mobile phone behaviour and the changing form of communicative patterns in the modern culture. Lastly, I hope that this study of mobile phone culture and the expression of modernity and cultural changes in Bangkok, as a case study providing empirical data in Thailand, will illuminate the dynamics of modernity and certain cultural patterns which are expressed by young people, as well as providing an insightful methodological and theoretical framework, which may be useful to other scholars.

Appendix

Appendix 1

"The mobile phone behaviours of Thai teenagers in Bangkok"

I confirm that the results of this questionnaire will only be used for the purpose of my PhD studies at Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University.

Ms. Chuensumon Ukritwiriya, Researcher

Please tick the correct box ☑ in front of your answer

Part 1: General information

1). Sex

    ☐ 1. Male   ☐ 2. Female

2). Age

    ☐1. 8-10   years old   ☐ 2. 11-13 years old

    ☐ 3.14 -16 years old   ☐ 4. 17-19 years old

    ☐ 5. 20-22 years old

3). Education level

    ☐ 1. Primary   ☐ 2. Junior high school

    ☐ 3. Senior high school   ☐ 4. Undergraduate student

4). Monthly Income

    ☐1. Less than 3,000 baht   ☐ 2. 3,001-5,000 baht

    ☐ 3. 5,001-7,000 baht   ☐ 4. 7,001-9,000 baht

    ☐ 5. More than 9,001 baht

Part 2 : Mobile phone behaviours

5). Who is your current mobile phone provider?

    ☐1.   GSM   ☐ 2. One 2 call

    ☐3.   DTAC   ☐ 4. Dprompt

    ☐5.   Orange   ☐ 6. Hutch

    ☐ 7.   Thai mobile   ☐ 8. GSM 1800

    ☐.9.   Orange Top-up   ☐10. others..............................

6). What is your mobile phone handset? Please identify

Brand......................................Model..

7). What features does your mobile phone have? (You can check more than one option)

    ☐1. Folder covers   ☐2. Digital camera

    ☐3. Colour screen   ☐ 4. Polyphonic

    ☐5. Radio   ☐ 6. Video

    ☐7. Internet   ☐ 8. Palm or computer

    ☐ 9. Cinema previews   ☐10. Do not have any

8). Which functions do you often use? (please rank 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

    ☐ 1. Calling   ☐2. Receiving incoming calls

    ☐ 3. Texting   ☐ 4. Taking photographs

    ☐ 5. Playing games   ☐ 6. Organizer

9). What do you have on your phone? (You can choose more than one option)

    ☐ 1. GPRS   ☐ 2. WAP

    ☐ 3. Bluetooth   ☐ 4. Infrared port

    ☐ 5. MMS   ☐ 6. EMS

    ☐7. None of these   ☐ 8. Other (please

    specify)...............................

10). What is the main purpose of your phoning? (You can choose more than one option)

☐1. To make appointments ☐2. To contact parents

☐3. To talk about study ☐4. To chat with friends

☐5. To contact teachers ☐6.To send SMS for TV game shows

☐7. To download ring tones & wallpapers ☐ 8 Other (please specify)...

11). How many mobile phone handsets have you had?

☐1. First one ☐ 2. 2-5 handsets

☐ 3. 6-10 handsets ☐ 4. More than 10 handsets

12). Why did you change your mobile phone handsets? (You can choose more than one option)

☐1. My handset was out of fashion. ☐ 2. I followed friends.

☐3. I lost the old one. ☐ 4. I was persuaded by advertising.

☐ 5. To use a family member's handset

13). How did you change your mobile phone? (You can choose more than one option)

☐1. Traded in the old one for a new one.

☐2. Bought a new one then gave the old one to a family member.

☐3. Bought a new one & dumped the old one.

☐4. Sold the old one & bought a new one.

14). Which non-voice services do you use? (You can choose more than one option)

☐1. Ring tone downloading ☐2. Picture downloading

☐3. Business information ☐4.Entertainment information

☐5. Fortune telling ☐6. Football information

☐7. Other (please specify)................................

15). How often do you join the mobile phone activities of your mobile phone provider?

☐1. Often ☐2. Never

☐3. Sometimes ☐ 4. Never and not interested

16). How many mobile phones do your family have (including your own)?

☐1. 1 handset (only me) ☐ 2. 2-4 handsets

☐3. Everyone has one ☐ 4.Other (please specify)...............................

17). How long is your phone on for?

☐1. 24 hrs. a day ☐ 2. On during the day and off before bed

☐ 3. Switched off in class ☐ 4. After school

18). Who do you call most?

☐1. Close friend(s) ☐ 2. Mother

☐ 3. Father ☐ 4. Girl/boyfriend

☐ 5. Sibling(s) ☐ 6. Other (please specify)...............................

19). Which person most influences your decision in buying mobile phones?

☐1. Mother ☐ 2. Father

☐ 3. Close friends ☐ 4. Girl/boyfriend

☐ 5. Siblings ☐6.Other (please specify)...............................

20). What is the longest duration you have talked on your mobile phone since you bought it? ....hrs...........sec

21). When did you first have a mobile phone?...................................years old

22). **How strongly do you agree with these statements?**

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I get quite annoyed when I hear other people's mobile phones ring.				
2. If I forget my mobile phone, I seem short of something.				
3. I think a mobile phone is important for communication in everyday life.				
4. I think it is rude when people talk loudly on mobile phones.				
5. I think personal matters should not be talked about on mobile phones.				
6. I think technology advances too fast; I can't keep up.				
7. I think I buy mobile phones that match my personality.				
8. My mobile phone is my close friend				
9. When I am on the mobile phone, I can do other activities at the same time.				
10. I think mobile phones should not be used when driving, as they cause accidents.				
11.I think mobile phones have become a fashion for teens				
12. Even if I am busy, I never miss an incoming call.				
13. I always concentrate on mobile phone conversations when I am talking without paying attention to other things.				
14. I take a very good care of my mobile phone.				
15. Even if I have a mobile phone, I want a new one when I see it advertised.				
16. I am merely concerned about the mobile phone provider rather than the handset.				
17. Brand name is an important factor in buying.				
18. I think I have enough information before buying a mobile phone.				
19. I think a mobile phone number is a personal thing that should be given only to my close friends and family.				
20. If I don't want to receive an incoming call from a particular person, I can cut off the line.				
21. When I get missed calls, I always call back.				
22. I kill time by calling people.				
23. I don't use all the functions of my mobile phone.				
24. I prefer talking on the mobile phone to face-to-face talking.				
25. I think a mobile phone is a luxurious thing for children.				
26. I use SMS on special occasions such as Birthdays, New year, Valentine's day etc....				
27. I think phone sex is not a big issue depending on whom I am talking to.				
28.I feel safe when I travel at night with my mobile phone.				

Part 3: Mobile phone advertising exposure on TV

23). Do you like watching mobile phone advertisements on TV?
        ☐1. Like it very much   ☐ 2. Like
        ☐3. No opinion   ☐ 4. Dislike

24).How often do you watch mobile phone advertisements on TV?
        ☐1. Rarely   ☐ 2. 2-3 times/week
        ☐3. 4-5 times/week   ☐ 4. More than 6 times/ week

25). What do you think mobile phones symbolize?
        ☐ 1. Modernity   ☐2. Communicative device
        ☐3. Relationship ties   ☐ 4. Close friend
        ☐5. Social status   ☐ 6. Fashion
        ☐7. Other (please specify)................................

26). What theme would you like mobile phone advertising to present?
        ☐1. Price   ☐2. Modern lifestyles
        ☐3. Advanced technology   ☐4. Modern communication
        ☐5. Family relationships   ☐6. Thai identity
        ☐7. Other (please specify)................................
27). Where do you get mobile phone information from?
        ☐1. Internet   ☐2. Brochures/ leaflets
        ☐3. Television commercials   ☐4. Close friends
        ☐5. Family members   ☐6. Magazines/ newspapers
        ☐7. Other (please specify)................................
28). Does mobile phone advertising have an influence on your buying decisions?
        ☐1. A lot of influence   ☐ 2. Some influence
        ☐3. Not sure   ☐ 4. No effect
29). Which TVC (not only mobile phones) do you <u>like most</u> at this
moments ?..

....
Reason..

....

....

....
30). Which TVC (not only mobile phone) <u>do you dislike most</u> at this
moment?...

....
Reason..

....

....

Thank you for your time

Appendix Table 2

Survey Title: "The mobile phone behaviours of Thai teenagers in Bangkok"

Part 1: Demographic data

1) Demographic data of 110 participants according to sex, age, education and income

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	46	41.8%
Female	64	58.2%
Total	**110**	**100.0%**
Age		
8-10 years old	7	6.4%
11-13 years old	40	36.4%
14-16 years old	12	10.9%
17-19 years old	18	16.4%
20-22 years old	33	30.0 %
Total	**110**	**100.0 %**
Education		
Primary school	23	20.9%
Junior High school	26	23.6%
Senior High school	22	20.0%
Undergraduate studies	39	35.5%
Total	**110**	**100.0%**
Income		
< 3,000 baht	57	51.8%
3,001-5,000 baht	22	20.0%
5,001-7,000 baht	17	15.5%
7,001-9,000 baht	8	7.3%
>9,001 baht	6	5.5%
Total	**110**	**100.0%**

Part 2: Mobile phone behaviours

Question 5: Mobile phone providers

Mobile phone provider	Frequency	Percentage
GSM	13	11.8%
One 2 Call	27	24.5%
DTAC	13	11.8%
Dprompt	13	11.8%
Orange	8	7.3%
Hutch	19	18.2%
GSM 1800	1	1.8%
Thai mobile	2	0.9%
Orange Top up	7	6.4%
PCT	7	5.5%
Total	**100**	**100.0%**

Question 6: Most popular mobile phone handsets

Brand name	Frequency	Percentage
Nokia	46	41.81 %
Motorola	17	15.45 %
Samsung	10	9.09 %
Sony Ericsson	7	6.36 %
Sanyo	7	6.36 %
Panasonic	4	3.63 %
Siemens	4	3.63 %
I-mobile	2	1.81 %
Alcatel	1	0.90 %
Kyocera	2	1.81 %
PCT	4	3.63 %
No answer	6	5.45 %
total	**110**	**100.0%**

Question 7: Popular features of mobile phones

Mobile phone features	Frequency	Percentage
Folder cover	42	38.2%
Digital photo	38	34.5%
Colour screen	59	53.6%
Polyphonic	48	43.6%
Radio/MP3 phone	14	12.7%
Video phone	9	8.2%
Internet	32	29.1%
Palmtop computer	0	0
Film Previews	9	8.2%
Other	30	27.3%

Question 8: Frequently used functions of mobile phones

The most frequently used mobile phone functions	Frequency	Percentage
Calling	69	62.7%
Receiving incoming calls	26	23.6%
Texting	5	4.5%
Taking photos	2	1.8%
Playing games	7	6.4%
Organizer	4	3.6%

Question 9: Special applications

Application	Frequency	Percentage
GPRS	61	55.5 %
WAP	42	38.2 %
Bluetooth	16	14.5 %
Infrared Port	29	26.4 %
MMS	45	40.9 %
EMS	15	13.6 %
Non of these	21	19.1 %
Other	3	2.7 %

Question 10: Main purpose of using mobile phones

Purpose	Frequency	Percentage
Contact parents	88	80.0 %
Arrange appointments	83	75.5 %
Chat with friends	77	70.0 %
Talk about studies	52	47.3 %
Download ring tones & wallpaper	29	26.4%
Contact teachers	21	19.1 %
Send SMS to TV game shows	13	11.8 %
Other	5	4.5 %

Question 11: How many mobile phone handsets have participants ever had?

Number of mobile phone handsets	Frequency	Percentage
1 handset (this is my first)	23	20.9 %
2-5 handsets	74	67.3 %
6-10 handsets	11	10.0 %
More than 10 handsets	2	1.81 %
Total	**110**	**100.0 %**

Question 12: The reason for changing mobile phone handsets

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
My handset was out of fashion	44	40.0%
Lost the old one	24	21.8%
To use a family member's handset	17	15.5%
Persuaded by Advertising	16	14.5%
Followed friends	9	8.2%
Total	**110**	**100.0 %**

Question 13: How to change your mobile phone

The way to change mobile phone	Frequency	Percentage
Bought a new one, then gave the old one to a family member	57	51.8 %
Traded in the old one & bought a new one	44	40.0 %
Exchanged the old one for a new one	18	16.4 %
Bought a new one & dumped the old one	9	8.2 %

Question 14: Non-voice services used

Non-voice service	Frequency	Percentage
Ring tone downloading	77	70.0 %
Picture downloading	56	50.9 %
Business information	11	10.0 %
Entertainment information	19	17.3 %
Fortune telling	16	14.5 %
Football information	8	7.3 %
Other	8	7.3 %

Question 15: How often do you join the mobile phone activities of your mobile phone provider?

How often	Frequency	Percentage
Often	3	2.7%
Sometimes	30	27.3%
Never	57	51.8%
Never and not interested	20	18.2%
Total	**110**	**100.0%**

Question 16: How many mobile phones do your family have (including your own)?

Number of handsets	Frequency	Percentage
One Handset (only me)	5	4.5%
2-4 handsets	44	40.0%
Everyone has one	54	49.1%
Other	7	6.4%
Total	**110**	**100.0%**

Question 17: How long is your phone on for?

How long	Frequency	Percentage
24 hrs. a day	61	55.5%
On all day; off before bed	21	19.1%
Switched off in class	18	16.4%
Switched on after school	10	9.1%
Total	**110**	**100.0%**

Question 18: Who do you call most?

Who do you call most?	Frequency	Percentage
Close friends	52	47.3%
Mother	20	18.2%
Father	9	8.2%
Girl/boyfriend	22	20.0%
Siblings	6	5.5%
Other	1	.9%
Total	**110**	**100.0%**

Question 19: Which person has the strongest influence on your decision to buy a mobile phone?

Person	Frequency	Percentage
Mother	45	40.9%
Myself	26	23.6%
Father	21	19.1%
Close friends	7	6.4%
Siblings	6	5.5%
Girl/Boyfriend	5	4.5%
Total	**110**	**100.0%**

Question 20: How long do you talk on mobile phone in everyday life?

Answer: The average duration is 2.10 hours per day.

The mode is 1 hour per day.

The extremely long talk is more than 3 hours, up to 10 hours or even 20 hours.

Question 21: How old were you when you first had a mobile phone ?

Answer: The average is 13 years old.

The mode is 10 years old and 17 years old.

Question 22: Agreement with statements

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I get quite annoyed when I hear other people's mobile phones ring.	8 (7.3%)	39 (35.5%)	**56 (50.9%)**	7 (6.4%)
2. If I forget my mobile phone, I seem short of something.	**48 (43.6%)**	34 (30.9%)	20 (18.2%)	8 (7.3%)
3. I think a mobile phone is important for communication in everyday life.	**58 (52.7%)**	44 (40.0%)	5 (4.5%)	3 (2.7%)
4. I think it is rude when people talk loudly on mobile phones.	33 (30.0%)	**53 (48.2%)**	20 (18.2%)	4 (3.6%)
5. I think personal matters should not be talked about on mobile phones.	5 (4.5%)	21 (19.1%)	**64 (58.2%)**	20 (18.2%)
6. I think technology advances too fast; I can't keep up.	**61 (55.5%)**	41 (37.3%)	7 (6.4%)	1 (0.9%)
7. I buy a mobile phone because it matches my personality.	31 (28.2%)	**48 (43.6 %)**	27 (24.5%)	4 (3.6%)
8. My mobile phone is my close friend	26 (23.6%)	**40 (36.4%)**	35 (31.8%)	9 (8.2%)
9. When I am on the mobile phone, I can do other activities at the same time.	17 (15.5%)	**61 (55.5%)**	25 (22.7%)	7 (6.4%)
10. I think mobile phones should not be used when driving; they cause accidents.	**79 (71.8%)**	22 (20.0%)	2 (1.8%)	7 (6.4%)
11. I think mobile phones have become a fashion for teens.	**72 (65.5%)**	32 (29.1%)	6 (5.5%)	-
12. Even if I am busy, I never miss an incoming call.	15 (13.6%)	32 (29.1%)	**55 (50.0%)**	8 (7.3%)
13. I always concentrate on mobile phone conversations when I am talking without paying attention to other things.	13 (11.8%)	25 (22.7%)	**55 (50.0%)**	17 (15.5%)
14. I take a very good care of my mobile phone	44 (40.0%)	**47 (42.7%)**	18 (16.4%)	1 (0.9 %)
15. Even if I have a mobile phone, I want a new	37	**47**	20	6

one when I see it advertised.	(33.6%)	**(42.7%)**	(18.2%)	(5.5%)
16. I am merely concerned about the mobile phone provider rather than the handset.	19 (17.3%)	**55** **(50.0%)**	35 (31.8%)	1 (0.9%)
17. Brand name is an important factor in buying mobile phones.	16 (14.5%)	**53** **(48.2%)**	38 (34.5%)	3 (2.7%)
18. I think I have enough information before buying mobile phone.	28 (25.5%)	**59** **(53.6%)**	19 (17.3%)	4 (3.6%)
19. I think a mobile phone number is a personal thing that should be given only to my close friends and family.	41 (37.3%)	**49** **(44.54%)**	19 (17.3%)	1 (0.9%)
20. If I don't want to receive an incoming call from a particular person, I can cut off the line.	21 (19.1%)	**38** **(34.5%)**	35 (31.8%)	16 (14.5%)
21. When I get missed calls, I always call back.	24 (21.8%)	**52** **(47.3%)**	28 (25.5%)	6 (5.5%)
22. I kill time by calling people.	25 (22.7%)	**45** **(40.9%)**	29 (26.4%)	11 (10.0%)
23. I don't use all the functions of my mobile phone.	25 (22.7%)	**50** **(45.5%)**	26 (23.6%)	9 (8.2%)
24. I prefer talking on the mobile phone to face-to-face.	19 (17.3%)	25 (22.7%)	**47** **(42.7%)**	19 (17.3%)
25. I think a mobile phone is a luxurious thing for children.	28 (25.5%)	**42** **(38.2%)**	26 (23.6%)	14 (12.7%)
26. I use SMS on special occasions, such as Birthdays, New Year, Valentine's day etc....	**55** **(50.0%)**	39 (35.5%)	14 (12.7%)	2 (1.8%)
27. I think phone sex is not a damaging issue depending on whom I am talking to.	13 (11.8%)	**36** **(32.7%)**	27 (24.5%)	34 (30.9%)
28. I feel safe when I travel at night time with my mobile phone.	**46** **(41.8%)**	35 (31.8%)	17 (15.5%)	12 (10.9%)

Part 3: Mobile phone advertising exposure on TV

Question 23: Do you like watching mobile phone advertisements on TV?

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
Like it very much	6	5.5%
Like	38	34.5%
Neutral/ no comment	60	54.5%
Dislike	6	5.5
Total	**110**	**100%**

Question 24: How often have you seen mobile phone adverts on TV?

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
Rarely	24	21.8%
2-3 times/week	35	31.8%
4-5 times/week	18	16.4%
More than 6 times/week	33	30.0%
Total	**110**	**100.0%**

Question 25: What do you think mobile phones symbolize?

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
1).Communicative device	80	72.2%
2).Modernity	67	60.90%
3).Relationship ties	49	44.5%
4).Fashion	47	42.7%
5).Close friendship	30	27.3%
6).Social status	23	20.9%
7).Other	2	1.8%

Question 26: What theme would you like mobile phone advertising to present?

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
1).Advanced technology	72	65.5%
2).Modern communication	66	60.0%
3).Modern lifestyles	34	30.9%
4).Price	34	30.9%
5).Family relationships	31	28.2%
6).Thai identity	23	20.9%

Question 27: Where do you get mobile phone information from?

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
Brochure/leaflet	49	44.5%
Close friends	37	33.6%
Internet	36	32.7%
Magazines/ newspapers	35	31.8%
TV commercials	30	27.3%
Family members	21	19.1%
Other	1	0.9%

Question 28: Does mobile phone advertising have an influence on your buying decision?

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
A lot of influence	9	8.2%
Some influence	75	68.2%
Not sure	17	15.5%
No effect	9	8.2%
Total	**110**	**100%**

The Appendix 3

The focus group process

The focus group sessions was planned and conducted over a period of three weeks in March 2004. This method was seen as quick and cost-effective which was explained as followed. The objectives and questions, including the moderator's guidelines were set out in the first week of time spending. Within the first week, video clips of mobile phone TV commercials were written in CD-ROM format by my friend who works at an advertising agency in Bangkok. It was very convenient to use this CD with my laptop computer. In addition, a tape recorder for recording the conversations was employed during the focus group sessions. Avoiding videotaping the group could be put in several reasons. One reason was that my participants would have found it distracting and would not have concentrated on the discussion. A further reason was, as Krueger said, "videotaping is obtrusive and usually not worth the effort" (1994:49).

At the same time, I contacted my key informants in both private and public schools so as to recruit the focus group participants. As previously mentioned, this was inconvenient for my Tween groups; therefore, I contacted another key informant who is a university lecturer in order to recruit university students instead of the Tween groups. All focus group participants were paid for their involvement to provide an incentive to come to the sessions and compensate for the time and effort involved (Krueger, 1994).

In the second week, I booked the dates and found a location where I could conduct the focus group near the participants' living areas. Finally, I received good cooperation from my key informants, who allowed me to use a library and a meeting room in their school and university respectively. During this week, the dates and times of the focus group sessions were arranged with all participants. To save cost and time, I arranged and conducted two focus groups on the same day. The interview with high-school girls' group was conducted in the morning session, while the high-school boys' group discussion was carried out in the afternoon. This idea was applied in the same way with the university students on another day. This is because the two genders have different habits. Girls are more responsible than boys and are more likely to get up

early. Thereafter, the final week was spent on conducting and analysing the focus group discussions.

I divided Thai teenagers into four groups in terms of sex, age and education by the purposive sampling technique. The groups were as follows: high school girls (15-18 years old), female university students (19-22 years old), high school boys (15-18 a-years old) and male university students (19-22 years old). Each group consisted of 6 people, and all participants were mobile phone subscribers. Moreover, they had all been exposed to TV commercials in the previous three months. Therefore, the total number of the focus group participants was 24.

Morgan and Kreuger (1993) noted that a group discussion should consist of 6-8 selected people who are similar with regard to sex, age range, education and income. In other words, the composition of a focus group is usually based on the homogeneity or similarity of the group members. This is because 'homogeneous respondents are more likely to provide similar responses to the moderator's queries' (Fern, 2001:17). On the other hand, heterogeneity may have a negative impact on the social environment and group cohesion; for example, sex issues can be better answered in a same-sex group.

In my study, I asked some question about courtship and sexual relationships, and each group provided their attitudes and opinions in relation to these issues comfortably. As Payne and Payne (2004) noted, focus group discussions should be restricted to a narrowly focused topic by group members of equal status who do not know one another. However, I would like to argue that it doesn't matter if group members know each other, as this facilitates group cohesion. Fern (2001) maintained, "focus groups of people who like each other (e.g., family and friends) should provide more discussion than groups of strangers" (2001:83). In my experience, when focus group participants know each other, communication flows better and opinions are given more freely, without the pressures that can arise in groups who do not know each other, like female university students and high school girls. For example, the male university groups who knew each other could talk freely on the issues of courtship and sex.

With regard to demographic data, the participants live in the inner outskirts of Bangkok. Most of the high school students live near their schools in Bung-Kum district, namely Seri-Thai Road, Rom Klao Road, Navamin Road, Ramkhamhaeng Road, Bangkapi and Ladpraw Road. Similarly, most of the university students live near their university, in the Prachachuen district, Din-Deang district, Huy Khawng district and Ladpraw district. The average expenditure of the high school students was less than 3,000 baht per month. Only one person spent about 3,001-5,000 baht per monthly. On the other hand, the average expenditure of the university students was about 5,001-7,000 baht per month. Only two persons spent about 7,001- 9,000 baht per month. Another two persons spent less than 3,000 baht. Furthermore, only one person spent 3,001-5,000 baht per month.

In terms of individual characteristics, my focus group participants were generally middle class. As Fern (2001) outlined, "status appears to be associated with cultural value orientation. Attributions about status are based on perceptions of an individual's characteristics such as age, gender, race, education, occupation, income and wealth. Higher-status members have more power and influence in the group than do lower-status individuals. Individuals with more power are attributed more status than individuals with less power. Also people with greater communication potential are perceived to be more important than people who have less communication potential" (2001:30-31). This can be elucidated in each focus group in the way in which they perceive themselves as equal in status. However, there was some competition amongst the female university group expressed through, for example, fashionable clothes, handbags and models of mobile phone.

The research setting

Morgan (1993) notes that the setting in which focus groups are conducted affects an individual participant's personal space and privacy. Therefore, it is important to arrange a convenient time and a suitable location that is accessible to all participants. Fern (2001) also emphasised that each setting provides a different ambience, which can affect how participants behave.

As for the university group, my key informant who is a university lecturer provided her department's meeting room. It was a quiet and private room with air conditioning. There was a big table in the middle of the room, surrounded by 6 chairs. Some of the participants were university students of this department; thus, they were familiar with this atmosphere. On the contrary, some of them were students from another department; therefore, I needed some help from other students to take them to this room. Although the other participants had to wait for a while at first, the focus group ran continuously with a comfortable atmosphere. This is because this room was not too big or too small. In addition, there were no interruptions from outside. Thus, the conversation was smooth and concentrated. Furthermore, this university location was close to the city centre and was well served by transportation services. Some of the participants went to the university regularly; therefore, the time and the setting were suitable for them. As Morgan (1998) outlines, "the first consideration in observation is the selection of a site where the research is conducted. The site must balance the needs of participants and the needs of the researchers" (1998:60).

On the other hand, the research setting for the high school students' groups was the library on the fourth floor of a lecture building which was expected to be a quiet place. However, because I conducted the focus group during the summer holidays, the librarian had turned off the air conditioning and opened windows so as to save cost. At the same time, there was a certificate ceremony taking place on the ground floor, so there were some noise interruptions during the morning session with the high-school girls. As I observed, they tried to concentrate on the discussion despite the hot weather and the noise from outside. Furthermore, I was allocated a space at the front of the library where a big table and 6-7 chairs were available. During the focus group, some people walked in and out, using the library facilities. Although the focus group did eventually meet the research objective, the research setting for the high-school group was not as good as I had planned. However, I had no opportunity to find a better place because their school was familiar to them. Additionally, they lived close to school, which made it preferable to alternative venues.

The role of the moderator

According to Morgan (1993), "the moderator is the instrument in a focus group interview. If the moderator, as the data-collection instrument, is not prepared, not attentive or not skillful, then the result will be just as bad as in a poorly prepared survey questionnaire" (1993:6). As a moderator who ran the focus group, I kept this concern in mind; therefore, I prepared moderator's guidelines beforehand and practiced them in order to be familiar with how the information would flow, as well as to test the scope and the timing of topics. In addition, I checked all equipment before conducting each focus group. Thereafter, I paid attention to my moderating style, as my listening and non-verbal communication skills were important to the conduct of focus groups as well as in interpreting the outcomes. As Krueger (1994) put it, "occasionally the moderator will choose to take on a specific role in the focus group interview. This role or style is selected because it creates an ambience that influences how the participants share information" (1994:104).

Fern (2001) noted that "The focus group moderator also plays an important role in determining the magnitude and types of effects the research setting has on cohesion of group members" (2001:19). As I mentioned above, the research setting in the library was not suitable for group discussion. Consequently, I sometimes had to encourage the group with funny questions and to trace back topics that participants had raised earlier in order to keep the focus group on track and to avoid boredom and compensate for the environment. Therefore, *ice-breaking* was a necessary activity in order to blend behaviour and reduce the cohesion gap in the case that some participants did not know each other. As Edmunds (1999) outlined, "the moderator will often implement one of a variety of ice-breaking techniques to relax respondents and start the flow of conversation. In addition to asking participants to introduce themselves, the moderator typically asks one of a variety of questions to set the pace for the group" (1999:81).

To take an example, I asked warm and friendly questions such as how they were today, the traffic and how far they lived from the research setting. During an *ice-breaking* activity, I called them by their nicknames rather than their first names, such as Kaew, Nid or Nat instead of Chantira, Puntip or Ponsiri respectively. Basically,

addressing people by their first names is regarded as formal in Thai culture. Thus, the use of nicknames can put all participants on the same level during the session (Edmunds, 1999). Furthermore, Fern (2001) stated that "focus group moderators with the same ethnic and racial background as the respondents are preferable in most cases" (2001:78). For my focus groups, my participants and I could share experiences and backgrounds with mobile phone use and the viewing of TV commercials during the session. This topic improved the cohesion of the groups and reduced group pressure. Furthermore, I took notes describing participants' behaviours after the focus groups had finished.

1.) <u>The introduction stage</u> – I opened by introducing myself to my research participants and informed them that I was a PhD student of Cardiff University. Therefore, I needed their information, which would only be used for the benefit of my PhD education. After that, I asked them to introduce themselves as well. Afterwards, I gave a brief overall introduction to the focus group methodology. However, before the focus group started, I began with small talk to make my research participants feel more comfortable while waiting for all members to arrive. As Krueger (1994) explains, "the function of small talk is to create a warm and friendly environment and put the participants at ease. But, purposefully avoid the key issues to be discussed later in the session" (1994:108).

Meanwhile, a questionnaire was provided to each while they were waiting for other people in the session. As Krueger (1994) noted, "focus groups can be used before a quantitative study, during a quantitative study, after a quantitative study or independent of other methodological procedures" (1994:30). For my study, I conducted the focus group after my survey research. This is because focus group interviews can provide insights about the meaning and interpretation of results that questionnaires could not provide. For instance, I asked a question on the issues of image and voice, and which one has more power: many research participants gave different comments on this issue.

During the *ice-break activity* at the beginning of the focus group discussion, I used their words or slang words that they used in their everyday lives to create a warm atmosphere. To emphasise that I was at the same level as the students, I dressed

casually and used positive body language; for example, I always smiled and encouraged them to give opinions. It is hoped that this reduced the gap of age differentiation between my research participants and I. This is because at the beginning of the focus groups, some participants were reluctant to speak or express all their feelings or attitudes on a topic. They preferred to listen to other people's views rather than talking themselves. As a moderator, I therefore had to encourage them to speak. However, as time progressed, they became familiar with the group and were not shy about giving their opinions. The opinions that they gave were spontaneous, rather than pre-prepared answers. That is the advantage of the focus group method. To get a sense of this, Morgan and Krueger (1993) explained that, "in contrast to surveys in which one is frequently warned against asking about a topic if people do not have prior opinions, the interaction in focus groups often creates a cuing phenomenon that has the potential for extracting more information than other methods" (1993:17).

2). <u>Focus group objective</u> –My objectives for the focus groups were divided into four main parts. The first were to acquire demographic and psychographic data, as well as information on lifestyle patterns, leisure and hobbies in my participants' everyday lives. The goal in using these data to interpret outcomes may be varied by sex and educational differentiations. Secondly, I set out to explore issues of mobile phone behaviour and experience of using mobile phones. Therefore, I asked everyone to introduce their mobile phone behaviours, for example when they used their first mobile phones and how many mobile phones they had owned so far. These issues provide insight into mobile phone consumption and how young Thais make sense of their mobile phones.

The third part was to investigate media exposure, in particular TV commercials from the past to present, including the style or appeal of TV commercials that the participants liked. These data could provide information on media consumption and habits, as well as the attitude towards general TV commercials. The final purpose was to examine the participants' interpretations of four mobile phone TV commercials. The assessment of the effectiveness of TV commercials, motivation and the cognition process towards brand perception were investigated. These can be illustrated in terms of how each group interprets/decodes the message from TV commercials in a particular way.

3). <u>Viewing TV commercials</u> – After the third objective had been achieved, I displayed four mobile phone TV commercials one by one. Starting with 'The Calling Melody", I displayed one commercial at a time and then asked questions related to the objective of this part. Afterward, I showed the commercial again during the conversation. This was because, following the semiotics approach, I needed their opinions and a review of the point that they raised. Thereafter, the other three mobile phone TV commercials were displayed in the same way.

4). <u>Asking questions</u> – questions are the heart of the focus group interview, and the quality of answers is directly related to the quality of the questions. Put more simply, the questions are the 'stimulus' for the participants. As Krueger (1994) noted, "The focus group goes through several types of questions, each of which serves a distinct purpose" (1994:54). To some extent, I followed Krueger's thought in asking opening questions, introductory questions, transition questions, key questions and ending questions.

As regards opening question, I used questions such as, "can you introduce yourself; what are you studying; what is your lifestyle both on weekdays and at the weekend? These opening questions took 10-15 minutes and served to warm up and to start the session. Each person spent 2-3 minutes answering these questions in order to identify the characteristics that the participants had in common.

To introduce this topic, I asked some questions about mobile phone use and experiences. For instance, I asked, 'in your opinion, what is the meaning of mobile phones? Why are mobile phones important in your everyday lives?' I then asked, 'how many mobile phones have you owned from the past to present?' As Krueger (1994) stated, "these questions can introduce the general topic of discussion and/or provide participants an opportunity to reflect on past experiences and their connection with the overall topic" (1994:54). Therefore, these questions led to the transition question, in which I linked mobile phone-related behaviours with the influences of mobile phone TV commercials. This stage took 30 minutes and illustrated the participants' favourite mobile phone TV commercials in comparison with other TV commercials. In doing this, the participants could gain an overview of the ongoing discussion.

Following this, the key questions were raised. These are the questions from which the analysis is derived. Therefore, I divided the key questions according to each mobile phone TV commercial: (1) The Calling Melody (2) Marathon Calling (3) The Quality of Network (4) Happy birthday - 50 baht top up card. For each TV commercial, I asked questions about the issues of cognition and recall. For example, 'how do feel about this TV commercial?' 'what aspect of this TV commercial attracts your interest?' and 'what elements of the TV commercial do you think you would remember after two months?. Furthermore, the issue of semiotic analysis was raised here, with questions such as "why is she dressed in this colour? What does the picture on his T-shirt signify?" I spent time almost an hour on these key questions, with approximately 20 minutes per commercial.

Finally, the ending questions involved a summary of the discussion in order to review any issues that might have been missing. Furthermore, I employed an imaginative, projective technique to give them an exercise about what if particular products (AIS, DTAC, GSM 1800) were to become human: who they would be; where they would live; what vehicle they would use; what characteristics they would have; what hobbies and leisure interests they would have and so forth. I spent 10 minutes on this imaginative task. Therefore, I spent a between 1 hour 30 minutes and 1 hour 45 minutes with each group. This was because if the session took more than 2 hours, my participants would have become bored with the conversation.

The atmosphere of each focus group

Group 1

High-school girls (16-18 years old) - most of them were in the second year of senior high school and the rest were in the final year of senior high school. Two persons arrived on time at 10.00 am, and another two arrived about 30 minutes late. This was because they had to attend their certificate ceremony first. They apologised to the people who were waiting. The other two participants, who were friends of the two who had arrived on time, were on their way. In this case, mobile phones were very useful to reduce the concern that they might not turn up. During the 45-minute wait, I

gave them questionnaires to answer in order to kill the time. Therefore, this session eventually started at almost 11 am and ended just before 1 pm. After everyone had arrived, I explained why I was conducting this focus group. Although some people had had to wait for a long time, they still seemed enthusiastic about cooperating in expressing their opinions. In general, nobody dominated the discussion, even though there were two seniors in this group. In general, they gave quite positive comments on the issues. Just two persons gave negative opinions about mobile phone use.

Most of the participants were dressed in a casual and fashionable style, because they were on summer holidays. Only two were wearing their school uniforms. Although the room was not protected from noise outside, the conversation still ran smoothly in a light-hearted way, with funny comments on topics related to courtship and mobile phone use.

Group 2

Female university students (19-22 years old) – most of them arrived on time at 10.00 am. One person arrived about 20 minutes late. Therefore, this session started at 10.30 am and ended at nearly 12.30 pm. with the completion of questionnaires. Half of the participants were studying Accountancy and Information Systems. The rest were studying Mass Communication. Therefore, their characteristics were different. At the beginning of this group, they were shy about introducing themselves and their personal lifestyles and interests. Most of them were too polite and considerate. Two or three persons who were open-minded dared to speak and gave good opinions. The others followed other peoples' opinion by nodding their heads and said "Uhm...yes... yes". Sometimes, they copied the answers given by the opinion leaders in the group. By the middle of the session, these quiet and considerate people started to give their own comments rather than agreeing with everyone else. Only one person remained quiet, even though I tried to probe her for responses. Generally, this group gave some good comments on the semiotic analysis in terms of the meanings represented in advertising.

Although the atmosphere of the room was quiet and private with air-conditioning, some of the participants seemed uncomfortable at the beginning of the session. Half

of them were wearing university uniforms and the others wore fashionable styles. It seemed to me that those who wore uniforms were less relaxed than those who were dressed in fashionable styles.

Group 3

High-school boys (16-18 years old) – Generally, they were friends who were studying at Mathayom 5 in the same school. Only one person was studying at another school; he was a friend of the people in this group who had joined this session via the snowball technique. Fortunately, they arrived on time; therefore, this group started at 2.00 pm. and ended at approximately 3.30 pm with the completion of the questionnaires. It was observed that the atmosphere in this group was quite friendly, relaxed and humorous. All of them were dressed in causal styles such as in jeans and T-shirts. One of them was obviously seen as gay. Therefore, he was the focus of the group on issues that related to handsome guys represented in TV commercials. However, he became the person who gave more opinions than others. The others were expressive and sometimes gave negative viewpoints on the issue of mobile phone experience, which were very interesting. In short, I received overall cooperation from this group because some of them were my participant informants in the fieldwork.

As I mentioned in the previous section, the room was not completely quiet. Therefore, I had to focus on my probe questions to them, which worked successfully. Generally, they concentrated on the topics that they were interested in, for example, mobile phone experiences and the meanings of mobile phones.

Group 4

Male university students (19-22 years old) - most of them were friends, and were third-year university students. This group were open-minded people and they were keen to express themselves. This was because they were Mass Communication students. Furthermore, they had some knowledge about marketing strategy, brand image and film techniques, which helped the conservation to flow in the section about TV commercials and their interpretation. Most of them arrived on time at 1.30 pm;

therefore, I gave them the questionnaires in order to collect demographic data and overall mobile phone-related behaviour. The session ended at 3.15 pm. During the session, they gave many interesting points with both negative and positive aspects. There were some arguments about some points, but these were resolved amicably. They were dressed in casual styles like jeans and T-shirts, apart from one person who was dressed much more neatly than the others. The overall characteristics of this group were that they were friendly and quite technology-oriented. Given their age, they had experienced nightlife. This illuminated the lifestyles of older Thai teenagers.

As regards the atmosphere in the room, it was quiet, private and air-conditioned. However, I noticed that some of the participants sometimes looked very tired.

Thai teenagers' lifestyles, leisure and hobbies

Group 1 (School girls)

During the week, they were at school from 7 am-to 3 pm. Thereafter, they spent their leisure time with friends, hanging around at the shopping mall after school. Some liked to eat snacks with friends before dining at home with the family. Their favourite foods were Som Tum (papaya salad), Mou Krata (grilled barbeque pork and hot pot), ice cream and so forth. At the weekend, they stayed at home to do various activities such as watching movies and TV, playing on the internet and chatting on mobile phones. Some of them liked to go out shopping with friends at the weekend. Their favourite place was The Mall Bangkapi, the department store near their houses. One person's hobby was composing poems and writing short stories. Another took care of her pets, dogs and cats. One person enjoyed cooking at the weekend with her family.

Group 2 (Female University students)

Most of them liked to spend their leisure time after class and ay the weekend at the big department stores, such as Central Ladpraw, Siam square and MBK shopping mall. Some of them had boyfriends, so they spent time together at weekends, going to the cinema, dining out or going to the beach near Bangkok. Some liked to go shopping for brand name clothes and fashionable accessories. One person liked to use

internet cafés in her leisure time. During their leisure time at university, they were likely to go to the library and the canteen.

Group 3 (School boys)

During the week, they spent their time at school from 7 am. – 2 pm. Some helped their teachers in extracurricular activities, such as Public Relations assistants creating posters and running the school's internal radio. Additionally, after school, they were likely to eat snacks together, like Mou Krata (grilled barbeque pork and hot pot), or Som Tum or Shabushi (Japanese sukiyaki). At the weekend, some of them stayed home to do various activities like watching movies and TV and playing on the internet. During the summer holiday, some of them stayed in Bangkok, while others went to another province for a few days. They used mobile phones for communication. One person helped his parents to sell things in their shop ay the weekend. Another person created a web site for a music band's fan club as a hobby.

Group 4 (Male University students)

All participants in this group studied on the evening programme, which ran from 5.00 pm until 8.00 pm. on weekdays. Before class, they would normally call each other every day to check the activity programme. They liked to gather at the snooker shop after class or hang around at pubs or bars in the famous nightlife areas like Soi Tonglow and Sukhumvit Road. Most of them lived with their parents; one person stayed with his cousin and one rented his own accommodation. At the weekend, they reported a variety of hobbies, including taking care of fish, decorating the home, surfing the internet and on-line gaming and playing instruments.

Appendix 4

Synopsis of the ethnographic film

This ethnographic film consists of seven scenarios showing different cultural events where Thai teenagers expressed themselves, to some extent, through mobile phones.

Theme 1: Syncretic Religion and Belief in love: Pra Trimurati

The first theme demonstrates cultural transformations and syncretic religion which is referred to Hindu influences in Thai Buddhism. One of the influences is represented in Pra Trimurati, a miniature statue of a Hindu God, in relation to a belief in love. On every Thursday night, especially on the Valentine's Day, Thai teenagers gather around in front of Pra Trimurati statue to pay homage. Their main purpose is to pray with a bunch of red roses, joss sticks and candles, while reading text sermons in front of the replica, for their true loves and soul mates. The film aims to show how Thai teenagers incorporate mobile phones in confirming a meeting point at this holy place with friends and in displaying their cool identities by using cool brands of mobile phones in the public.

Theme 2: Dancing with Pra Prom Erawan

This film tells about another belief in Hindu gods in the Thai Buddhist culture. Pra Prom Erawan, a statue of a Hindu God with three heads and six arms, is located in the business area on Rachadamri road. It originates cultural beliefs of Thai people and Thai teenagers in terms of wishing for their desires in their lives e.g. sons and daughters, wealth and prosperity and the recovering from sickness and illness. As Thai people realize it, when people ask for something or make a wish to these Hindu gods, they have to give back something that the gods are fond of when their wishes are granted. For example, *Pra Trimurati* likes red roses; meanwhile, *Pra Prom Erawan* is fond of small wood crafted elephants, big chain of flowers and *La khon Chatri* (a traditional Thai dance) performances. The film shows how traditional Thai dancers of *La Khon Chatri* use mobile phones in their leisure time at the show.

Theme 3: Mobile phone at Japanese Concert

This film shows the youth culture in terms of their leisure activities at a Japanese concert. The main purpose of this film aims to assert that Japanese culture has influenced Thai teenagers' subculture. It demonstrates the way they dress and participate in the concert, in addition to how they have social interactions with their mobile phones in sending SMS and taking picture by their mobile phones.

Theme 4: Mobile phone as a throwaway technology

The film observes how mobile phone has been inserted into Thai household as part of the representation of modernity. Particularly in Vee's family, the film shows that family's members make meanings of their mobile phones and reveals how mobile phones play important roles in their families. It demonstrates that for parents, mobile phones become necessary communicative devices to keep in touch with children. Meanwhile, mobile phones can be seen as the means of self expression to their friends. Furthermore, mobile phones can be connoted as the rubbish technology which parents perceive that they may be accumulated in the future when they get out of date.

Theme 5: Cool culture at School

The film reveals the distinctions of cool culture in the private and public schools where Thai teenagers have social interactions with their mobile phones in different settings such as in the canteen and the school's social events. It demonstrates students' lifestyles and leisure during their lunchtimes. This may show that mobile phones have become the indispensable communication technology in their everyday lives.

Theme 6: Mobile phone Shopping

The film aims to show the consumption patterns of Thai teenagers in a famous department store in Bangkok. Vee, Mo and Golf are my research participants who demonstrate their window-shopping for mobile phones. In the department store, the

film reveals the culture of mobile phone shopping alongside the shop displaying, advertising representations and brand images.

Theme 7: The Modernity of Mr.Tabb

The section shows the accounts of modernity of Mr.Tabb, my research participant in the St. John School. The film demonstrates the observation of Tabb and his peer group's lifestyles. It illustrates the culture of offering food for monks in the morning of Tabb's group. This shows how Thai culture is embedded in their everyday lives. Furthermore, the film shows how they use modern and hi-technology of mobile phones to create their cool selves in school which may draw particular attentions from other friends.

Appendix 5

5. 1) The calling melody: AIS

As seen in the storyboard above, this TV commercial starts with a shot of two young men aged approximately 18-22. They are sitting on the same comfortable sofa in a living room. A camera in a medium long shot (MLS) introduces two boys in this scene, who are good looking and whose characters and personalities are perceived as modern and artistic. They wear T-shirts and jeans that make them look easy and casual. Thereafter, the shot fades into another shot, which continues with the young man on the left hand-side receiving an incoming call. Thereafter, the phone belonging to the other young man on the right also rings. They stare at each other as their phones continue to ring, but do not pick them up.

This shot cuts to another shot with the music of the 'Calling Melody' playing over the scene. A Thai song by a pop singer, which is a hit record at the time when the advertisement is released, is played; its lyrics can be translated as: *"you are the right one; you are the person of my dreams"*. A medium close up shot (MCU) depicts a lovely young woman of same age, wearing long hair and a white short-sleeved top and listening to this song. She smiles and her face expresses her happiness as if this song implied a specific meaning to her. Then, in a long shot, the camera introduces another young woman listening to the same song in a corridor. She leans close to the wall so as to escape from the public space. Of course, she is listening to the same song as does the previous girl.

Then, the song changes into a new song with a slow rhythm. The meaning of this song refers to "unfulfilled love". The scene changes, and in a long shot (LS), another young girl sitting in a restaurant slides under the table. Next, the camera uses a high angle shot to present another girl who falls down in a courtyard. With the same song playing on, the following shot shows many young women falling down in various places because this song has gone directly to their hearts. In other words, these young girls act as if they represented the meanings of such disappointed love.

The scene then changes suddenly with a new song. The rhythm of this song is more percussive. It refers to the meaning of *"you are a lovely girl."* The shot shows a young woman falling to the floor as crowds of people walk past her. A ring-tone then links this scene to the scene of the two young men, still sitting comfortably on the sofa. In a medium long shot, they smile at each other and in the same scene we see their mobile phones on the table, which is in the foreground. Meanwhile, the shot cuts into a close-up shot in order to show the IDs of the people who are calling them. Appearing on the screens are the names "Jenny" and "Mint" which the two young men have assigned to hear such "Calling Melody". The following shot is split into four screens so as to present the subsequent actions of the girls who are listening to the music of the "Calling Melody" service.

Thereafter, the details of this service, such as its direct telephone number, are superimposed over the same scene of the two young men, who are still smiling and happy with the calling melody service. Meanwhile, the narrator's voice-over says, "The hot non-voice service of Calling Melody for choosing the music or the words of popular artists to give to your girls or guys while they are waiting for you to pick up their calls. Call * 789. From Mobile Life, especially for One-2-Call subscribers". The logos of Mobile Life and One-2-Call are displayed in the last shot, on a black screen to make the logos stand out.

<u>"Calling Melody": 30 seconds</u>

Shot1: Ring tone rings.

Shot 2: Ring tone keeps ringing on

Shot 3: Another incoming calling ring.

Shot 4: Music " Thur Phen Khon (You are the one..

Shot 5: Music " Deaw Loey Thee Chai.." (You are the right one.)

Shot 6: Music " Thur Pen Arai Yang Thee Fhen."

(You are exactly as I have dreamt about)

Shot 7: Music " Nhang Khum Wa Ruk"
(If the word of love…)

Shot 8: Music " Mun Ray"
(is unfulfilled.)

Shot 9: Music " Kub Thur" (to you)

Shot 10: Music" Proh Thur Na Ruk" (because you are cute)

Shot 11: Music "Thur Na Ruk" (You are lovely)

Shot 12: "Ring tone rings again."

Shot 13: narrator voice over: "The hot service"

Shot 14: "Choose music or the popular artist's words."

Shot 15: "give to your girls"

Shot 16: "While they are waiting for you to pick up."

Shot 17: "press * 789
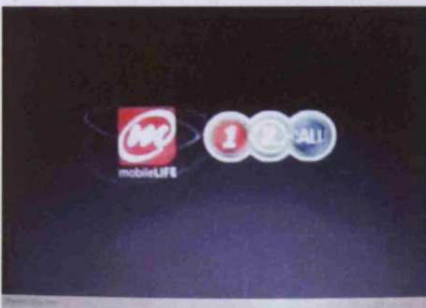
Shot 18: "From Mobile Life, especially, the 1 2 Call subscribers."
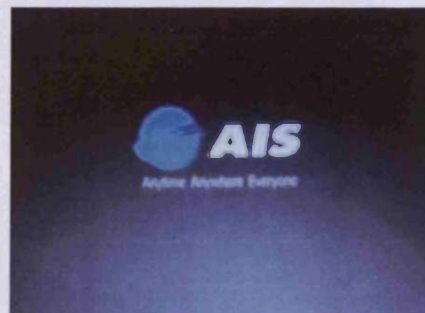
Shot 19: "The more you change, the hotter you are."

5. 2). The Marathon Calling: *GSM 1800*

The TV commercial starts with a medium shot (MS), which introduces a little cute girl, wearing a blue polo T-shirt and having just come back from school. In the foreground, there is a plate of red jelly and a glass of milk in front of her. In the medium shot, the scene shows that she is sitting at a dinner table. She is holding a mobile phone in her right hand and talking with her father, telling him about her sports day. The next shot reveals that her father is in a meeting with his co-workers. Then, a medium close up (MCU) shot of her father shows that he is listening to his daughter's talk, cut by switching to the medium shot of the girl talking.

Next, a close up (CU) shot shows her facial expression as she pays attention to talking. In this shot, the producer intends to show how cute she is. She continues to talk and sing a sports song; meanwhile, her father cannot say anything because he is in a meeting. He is merely nodding his head. Then, another scene shows the little girl dancing and singing with a blue pom-pom in her other hand. Several long shots exhibit her interaction with the mobile phone in different settings in the house such as the kitchen, the corridor and the living room, in order to present the mobile phone behaviour of children. It can be seen that while talking, she is moving around the area. Last but not least, a high angle shot shows that she is dancing on the floor, acting out the meanings of the song that she is singing. As can be seen, she pretends that she is dying. Thereafter, the narrator's voice-over explains the *"Marathon Calling"* campaign within the scene of the girl talking, switching with the scene of her father.

Finally, this TV commercial ends with a logo scene, which includes the superimposed name of the campaign, "Marathon Calling", and the detail of the price rate, and then the logo GSM 1800 appears. To emphasise the cute little girl, the last shot represents her screaming "Weed...Boom" on the mobile phone again.

"The Marathon Calling": 30 Seconds

Shot 1: "Daddy, Today

Shot 2: "I went to on the sports day at school."

Shot 3: I have a lot of fun.

Shot4 : "Uhmm…."

Shot 5: "Today I danced like crazy (Ten Kra Jay)."

Shot 6: "Then, I sung a song, too"

Shot 7: "Uha...."

Shot 8: " Uhm.. It's not this song"

Shot 9: "Here... this song"

Shot 10: "Kek Huay Tuay Yai Yai Chae Ow Wai Yu Nai Tue Yen" (A big charisma tea is chilled in the refrigerator.)

Shot 11: "See Maung Khao Pan Ma Hen"
(A purple group passed to see it)

Shot 11: "Abb Perd Tue Yen Kin Nam Kek Huay" (They opened the refrigerator to drink a charisma tea.)

Shot 12: "…Chak….k… heg heg heg…" (They are going to die.)

Shot 13: "Daddy… I have got another song."

Shot 14: "Yes…"

Shot 15: Choose the marathon calling from GSM 1800."

Shot 16: You can call with a double time. The minimum rate is 1 baht and 12 stangs

Shot 17: "When you purchase within 31 March."
Girl – " Weed Boom…"

5.3). 'The quality network': AIS

This TV commercial opens with a long shot that uses the camera's eye instead of the viewer's eye as if they were rafting in the river alongside natural and beautiful scenery, with intro music. Then, the narrator's voice-over says, *"2540 (*converted into a global year as *1997): the first nationwide signal coverage in Thailand"*. Next, the camera introduces a man wearing a safari suit with an old-fashioned mobile phone in his hand. He talks on the phone, describing his surroundings. Meanwhile, the narrator continues, *"10 years ago, no one believed that one day we could use the mobile phone to connect ourselves with everyone, anywhere."* Thereafter, the shot cuts into a long shot of a long queue of people in a bank. In the foreground is a lady who is clearly frustrated with the queue. The narrator continues, *"one day the mobile phone could transfer your money"*. Many people including the lady disappear from the scene. The superimposed advertisement copy appears, saying, *"2543 (*converted into a global year as *2000): opened the first M-banking via the Mobile Life service"*

Subsequently, in a close-up shot, the screen of a mobile phone is shown, loading data. Within this continuous scene, the camera cuts into a medium shot of a young man who has this mobile phone in his hand. He stands outside a meeting room and he looks relieved as he has been successful in sending the data files. Then, at the same time, the voice-over of the narrator says, *"or one day, we can send huge files of data within a few minutes"*. The superimposed advertisement copy dissolves into the shot, saying, *"2546 (converted in global years as 2003) - the first high-speed intelligent network"*. Within the same shot, the camera pans to show another room, in which people in a meeting disappear and the light is switched off.

Then a new long shot with continuous camera movement from the previous shot fades in. The scene is of a cinema with adults and children enjoying a movie. In the scene, there are some empty seats. In a few seconds, many people are dissolved into the shot to fill the seats, as the narrator's voice-over says, *"Today, AIS has developed an intelligent network with a high speed, so you can rest assured that you are with the quality network"*. From the cinema scene, a camera with a medium long shot shows a yacht sailing into the scene. There are some people dancing on the yacht. The final

shot ends with the AIS logo and the narrator claims the slogan: *"AIS - your network, anywhere, anytime"*.
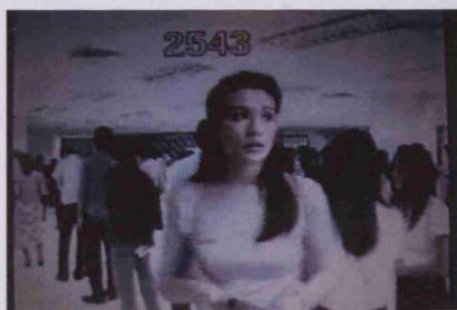
"The Quality Network": 30 Seconds

Shot 1: The narrator voice over - "10 years ago, no one believed that …"

Shot 2: One day we could use the mobile phone to connect ourselves with everyone anywhere…"

Shot 3: One day… (Dissolve)"

Shot 4: "The mobile phone could transfer your money."

Shot 5: "Or one day, we can send.."

Shot 6: " …the huge files of data."

Shot 7: within a few minutes by a mobile phone"

Shot 8: …music

Shot 9: Music continues

Shot 10: "….Today AIS

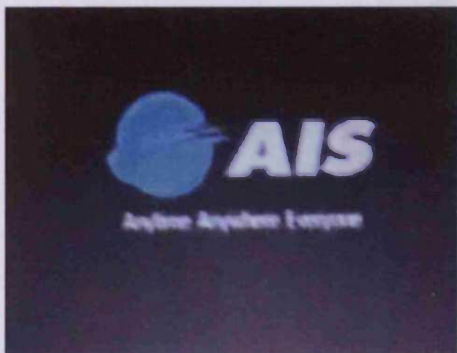Shot 11: "has developed the intelligence of network"

Shot 12: "with a high speed..."

Shot 13: "to make you rest assured that…"
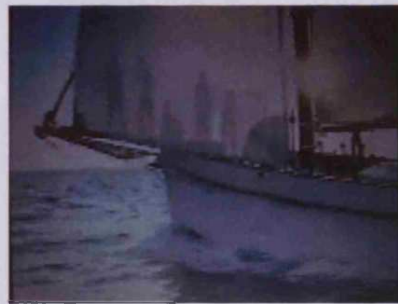
Shot 14: "you are with the quality network"

Shot 15: AIS Anytime Anywhere Everyone

5.4). Happy Dprompt – 50 baht top up card: DTAC

In the first shot, a close up shot shows a hand of a Tween boy presenting a top-up card with a silver ribbon to a hand of a girl. Then, the shot cuts into a medium long shot that shows the same Tween boy and girl sitting on a swing. The Tween girl has braided hair and wears a beautiful pink short sleeved top. Meanwhile, the Tween boy has a secondary school hairstyle and wears a silk-screened white T-shirt with a picture of a dog and an airplane painted in the middle. They are teasing each other. Then, the Tween girl says, *"your gift is quite unique; it is unlike my other friends' gifts."* The Tween boy replies, *"So, I am not like your other friends".*

The camera focuses on his face: he can't look at the girl because he is shy. Then, he says, *"Can I be more than a friend?"* The shot cuts into a medium shot, which shows the Tween girl hitting her head on a moving pole. Within the same action, a special effect pops up with the sound that expresses her happy and embarrassing feelings. Thereafter, the narrator's voice-over says, *"Feel a unique happiness with the new happy 50 baht top-up card from DATC."* The camera shows a happy top-up card package being taken away from a shop. Finally, the advert closes with a logo shot that shows the Happy Dprompt logo and the DTAC logo within the same scene.

Happy Dprompt – 50 baht top up card: DTAC: 15 Seconds

| Shot1: intro music | Shot 2: "your gift is quite unique. It's unlike my other friends." |

Shot 3: "I wouldn't like to be like your other friends"

Shot 4: "Can I be more than friend?"

Shot 5: Sound Effect

Shot 6: The narrator's voice: "Fill your unique happiness with the new Happy top up card- 50 baht."

Shot7: "Happy from DATC."

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