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RIOTS ARE A PEOPLE PROBLEM, NOT A TECHNOLOGY ONE, SAYS USWITCH.COM

Social media and private messaging services such as Twitter and BlackBerry Messenger have redefined the way people communicate and, as the spread of rioting has now demonstrated, are proving to be a powerful mobilisation tool.

Alex Buttle, a mobile phone and social media expert at uSwitch.com, comments: "What's become clear is that, while social media can be a powerful force for good and for fun, it can also be subverted for more sinister purposes. Via social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and BlackBerry Messenger, people can mobilise and influence other like-minded people in real time — and all from the mobile phone in their pockets. Social media may still be in its infancy but the London riots have shown us its immense power.

"But, while it is easy to blame BlackBerry for the mess of the London riots, they are not the root of the problem. They are simply an easy scapegoat and we understand they are actively co-operating with the police, which is admirable.

"As for calls to have BlackBerry's BBM shut down, this will not solve the issue. If people want to call unrest, sadly they will. If BBM is forced to shut down, where do you draw the line? Should mobile phone networks be forced to shut down? Should BT be made to render its landlines inoperable? None are fair, make sense or are even workable.

"At the end of the day, this is a people problem, not a technology one. Blame those looting and starting fires, not the forms of communication they are using to encourage others."

For more information visit www.uswitch.com or call 0800 093 0607

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