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Mobile technology in the village: An anthropological view



Communication before the phones

- Visiting, letters
- Radio, television
- Difficulties in getting news from relatives in time and calling for help in case of emergencies

Research Question

- What new social forms mobile technology enables and how do the new social constellations relate to culture and cultural change?

The Setting

- Phones were adopted in a socially and economically dynamic situation
- Setting up the phone system and its usage involves many agents: the state, private service providers, technology producers, development discourses and the users

Village Sociality

- Sharing of phones and delivering messages
- Enhancing village sociality and the traditional methods of communication
- Contacts outside the village (relatives and friends) facilitate multiplicity and new alternatives
- Changes in village politics

Kinship net

- Majority of phone calls between relatives
- Intensification of kinship (rituals, help especially in health related problems, alliance creation) which may actually change the kinship
- Phones help to save in travelling costs

Gender

- Increased communication between women and their natal kin
- Traditionally these groups are supposed to keep distance
- Changes in women's position and kinship

The Economic Transformation

- Draws from prior economic and social processes
- Intensification of kinship boosts economy
- Phones increase the income of small scale entrepreneurs and have enabled starting of new business activities
- Eliminating the middle man
- Saving of time and travel costs
- Information about outside markets and job opportunities

The Impact

- **Homogenization of social logistics**
- New social patterns which appear where ever phones are introduced: greater market efficiency and facilitating the multiplicity of ties.

- Logistics refers to a careful organization of a complicated activity so that it happens in a successful and effective way
- 'Social logistics' accentuates the fact that logistics is inevitably tied to culture and social structure

- Like Horst and Miller my research exemplifies how the **appropriation of phones draws from the local culture**

- How can mobile technology at the same time homogenize social logistics and amplify existing cultural connections?
- **Mobile technology amplifies ongoing processes of cultural change but it does so selectively**
- All cultures recognize contradictory aspects of human experience, providing multiple cultural resources that individuals can draw on in times of change



- Development occurs as a side result of mobile phone sales but specific measures could greatly enhance the impact
- Mobile phone applications could enhance the developmental effects producing better health services, education, disaster management, banking services, business platforms for small entrepreneurs

- At the moment development applications of mobile technology remain isolated experiments at least in India
- How to motivate the private service providers to develop the business more towards poverty reduction?
- How to ensure that successful applications spread to the wider society from isolated projects?

- Need for better co-operation between all agents: states, handset manufacturers, consumers, service providers and civil society organizations

- Tenhunen, Sirpa. Mobile Technology in the Village: ICTs, Culture, and Social Logistics in India. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. September 2008. 14:3.