

# *A critical analysis of mobile telecommunications: a case of Swaziland*

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## ***Abstract***

Like most ICT for development (ICT4D) studies, most existing mobile telecommunications research takes a technocentric approach: they view mobiles as an answer to most problems in the developing world, from connectivity to poverty alleviation. This has resulted in the high consumption of mobiles and the mushrooming of mobile phone companies in the developing world. The technocentric studies that have been done on mobiles do not question the imperfections of this technology which has only been in Africa for slightly above two decades. This paper therefore seeks to delve into the flaws and limits of this technology: (1) a number of rural households are spending the little income they have in order to get ‘connected’; (2) with the urban areas ahead of rural areas in terms of harnessing and putting mobiles into good use a ‘new’ mobile divide is expected to emerge; and (3) the erosion of the moral compass, individualism and cosmopolitanism can be attributed to the blind adoption of this technology. Finally, the paper concludes that mobiles have been given a high status in the society, despite their hefty price and their contribution to social problems.

**Keywords:** Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Swaziland, United Nations (UN), Second Generation (2G), Third Generation (3G), gadgets, mobiles, MTN, inductive approach, households, youths, short message services (SMSes), E (emalangeneni, Swazi Currency), Micro- and small enterprise (MSE), Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D)

## **1. Introduction**

Through the colonization and post colonization periods the African continent has seen many calamities ranging from famine, war, disease (like HIV/Aids), inequalities, illiteracy, water shortages, abject poverty, poor sanitation, poor housing and deprivation (Metfula, 2007). The United Nations (UN) resolved to develop a unified strategy that would eliminate these problems. They branded this strategy as the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) (UN, 2005). Goal number eight of the MDGs talks mainly about global partnerships including the importance of ICTs in development (UN, 2010). This unquestioning faith in information and communication technologies (ICTs) was followed by the agreement of UN member states in 2005 to form a World Information Society (WIS) (ITU, 2006). The role of this information society was to reduce and eventually end the digital divide that exists between industrialized and developing countries (ITU, 2006). They (member states) wanted ICTs to be incorporated in almost every sphere of life such that digital opportunity for all is realized.

The aforementioned events were followed by the deployment of a series of Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) projects by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), some units of governments, research institutes, philanthropists and to mention a few. All these, as Heeks (2009) puts it, were similar if not the same in that they all lacked sustainability, scalability, evaluation and most importantly local relevance and content. Most projects that have been a result of this technological ‘conviction’ have ranged from being partial successes to being dismal failures (Heeks, 2002).

Mobile phones, being a creation of modern day technological innovation have played a crucial role in this technological ‘bid’. They have been tasked with many responsibilities, ranging from increasing connectivity and mobility to availing vital information for entrepreneurs in the developing world. They have been portrayed as gadgets that can help the developing world (especially Africa) to quickly transcend from its status quo of poverty to prosperity. This mobile ‘campaign and excitement’ has sidelined and ignored all problems that may be a result of the adoption and use of these gadgets.

This paper looks at the problems that have emerged from the adoption and use of mobile phones in Swaziland, ranging from affordability to social problems. Swaziland presents an interesting case because it has many of its citizens living below the poverty line (Government of Swaziland, 2006) and mobile telecommunication is highly monopolized, with MTN being the sole service provider and as a result of the monopoly prices are relatively high compared to those in the southern African region.

Moreover, this paper is a qualitative study based on data that was collected from the Manzini region (Swaziland). Two cases were looked at and then the data obtained was then analysed using the inductive approach, so as to get a generic picture of the results.

The structure of the paper is as follows: the following section (section two) looks at the background of Swaziland; section three looks at Swaziland's mobile telecommunications; section four is the literature review; section five is the methodology; section six reports on the case studies; section seven discusses the case studies based on the inductive approach; and then finally section eight makes a conclusion.

## **2. The Background of Swaziland**

The Kingdom of Swaziland which happens to be Africa's last absolute monarchy is a tiny landlocked country situated in the southern part of the African continent (Government of Swaziland, 2006). It is surrounded by Mozambique on the east and the Republic of South Africa on the north, south and west. It covers a total area of about 17, 400 km<sup>2</sup> and the population is estimated at 1.1 million (Government of Swaziland, 2002).

This tiny Kingdom is facing serious challenges ranging from economic ones to social ones. The current HIV/Aids rate is around 42.6%, with the youth and active population being the highly infected (Government of Swaziland, 2006). As result a high number of people in these groups live on HIV/Aids drugs e.g. Antiretroviral drugs (ARVs).

Even though the World Bank places Swaziland amongst the middle-income developing countries because of its GDP per capita, about 69% of the population lives below the poverty line, 48% of

the population cannot meet their food requirements and 76% of the population living in rural areas is poor whilst 50% of the urban population is poor (Government of Swaziland, 2006). As a result of these problems a large number of households in the rural areas rely heavily on subsistence farming (which is not always reliable especially in times of drought) and other survivalist activities like selling handicraft, clothes, fruits and vegetables.

The current economic growth rate is around 3% with 70% unemployment rate among women and 40% among the youth. The economic distribution is such that 56.4% of the economy is controlled by the richest 20% whilst the poorest 20% control only 4.3% (Government of Swaziland, 2006). Generally the prevalence of poverty is high among illiterate people.

### **3. Swaziland's Mobile Telecommunications**

Since 1998 the Swazi government has issued only one mobile licence, to MTN. This company, which is largely controlled and influenced by the government and the royal family, is owned largely by the government which has a controlling stake of 51% (these shares are held on behalf of government by the Swaziland Posts and Telecommunications Corporation (SPTC) which is a state run telecommunications company), 30% is owned by the MTN group, and 19% is owned by Swaziland Empowerment Ltd (MTN, 2006). SPTC also plays the role of being a regulator because there is no independent regulator yet in the country, so in other words Swaziland still has the regulator-operator problem. It is believed that Swaziland Empowerment Ltd is owned by the royal family and friends to the royal family.

Since its inception in 1998, MTN has accumulated a subscriber base close to half a million and operates a global system for mobile communications (GSM) network (MTN, 2009). They offer a wide variety of services ranging from voice calls, short message services (SMSes), emails, multimedia messaging services (MMSes) and other services that are supported by second generation (2G) and third generation (3G) technologies (Government of Swaziland, 2005). Recently, MTN introduced a number of services which enable users to transfer airtime (Me2U), to make requests to other users to give them a call (PLEASE CALL ME) and to make mobile calls at a certain discount (MTN Zone) (MTN, 2009). It should be noted however, that the availability of these services is not guaranteed, especially during peak hours. In 2009, MTN

reported that there was an increase in the number of users who are switching from 2G to 3G technologies and that a majority of subscribers use prepaid plans (meaning they have to purchase airtime from the many MTN retail outlets and agents in the country). The costs of MTN services are shown in Table 1. Those who are up until very late (after midnight) are able to make calls at discounts which are sporadically available.

<i>Services</i>	<i>Time of Day</i>	<i>Cost (E)</i> <i>E1.00 = R1.00</i>
Call (Category 1)	7:00 A.M. to 20:00 PM	E2.20
Call (Category 2)	20:00 P.M. to 22:00 P.M.	E1.60
Call (Category 3)	22:00 P.M. to 7:00 A.M.	E0.90
SMS	All the time (day or night)	E0.80

Table 1: Costs for Swaziland MTN services

Handsets are obtainable from official MTN retail outlets at prohibitive prices especially for those who want to use 3G gadgets. This problem of expensive mobiles has been eased partly by the large inflow of handsets from some Asian countries like China and India, but even these are not affordable by the rural poor.

#### **4. Literature Review**

Most existing ICT4D research, documents and speeches take an optimistic stance towards technology (Thompson, 2004). They view ICTs as a solution to almost every developmental problem that exists in the developing world. They give ICTs a ‘supernatural’ ability. In fact, they have branded them as artifacts that can solve everything, that have to be adopted, liked and used by everyone in the world and, most importantly, they give them number one priority regardless of the costs and tangible evidence of failure. Vosloo and Chigona (2010) make an interesting account when they state that the high rate of failure amongst ICT4D projects is a result of the technocentric mentality that has been preached by NGOs, governments and some research institutes.

Being technological gadgets, mobile phones have not been spared from this technological ‘crusade’ sweeping all across the developing world. From their alignment with MSE development in Nigerian case studies (Jagun, Heeks & Whalley, 2009), to their proposed usage

and potential in making payments in Ugandan case studies (Duncombe, 2009), one sees that these gadgets have been given a gigantic status for their 'rare' ability to help the developing world 'leapfrog' from its many problems. Therefore, as expected, a lot of attention has been given to these 'uncommon' gadgets and of course there is a lot of excitement about mobiles all over Africa (Best, Smyth, Etherton & Wornyo, 2010).

Mobiles have been in the African continent for slightly above two decades but they have seen overwhelming adoption and usage, some studies claim that it has taken a century to accumulate the first one billion landlines in the world while it took only a decade for mobiles to do the same (Donner, 2005). Mobiles are basically used by people from almost all the different socio-economic classes in the developing world, though there are some slight variations in the usage in the different age and gender groupings (Pertierra, 2005).

Most advancements in both rural and urban areas have been attributed to mobiles. Duncombe and Heeks (1999) claim that entrepreneurs have started reaping the fruits of 'real-time voice communication' and as a result they find being 'connected' advantageous. These gadgets are believed to be the cause of reliable connection for entrepreneurs and to be the greatest source of information that has never been seen in business circles (Molony, 2006).

On top of these entrepreneurial 'praises' that mobiles have received, they have also successfully accumulated social 'praises'. Pertierra (2005) asserts that the constant connectivity provided by mobiles has resulted in the revival and rejuvenation of local communities. His views are supported by Best, Smyth, Etherton and Wornyo (2010) who attribute personal security, connectivity with friends and family and improved social status to mobiles.

Therefore, from the above evidence we have seen the 'indispensable' nature of mobiles in the developing world. However, that does not mean that these gadgets are without blemish, with no flaws and limitations. Critical mobile technology research has unearthed a number of problems and limitations that are no match for these 'uncommon' artifacts: issues of affordability (Gillwald, 2010), heavy reliance on traditional means of communication (Molony, 2008) and an

array of social problems that have deeply worn out the moral fibre in the developing world (Pertierra, 2005).

## **5. Methodology**

### *5.1 The Inductive Approach*

Induction starts with a defined set of specific observations and then seeks to come up with a trend that represents all the events that have been given, in other words it moves from the particular to the general (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005). The primary objective of the inductive approach is to use the observations identified in the beginning to come up with a hypothesis that best fits the information obtained (Hoyle, Harris & Judd, 2002). After the hypothesis has been established slowly a theory that makes sense of the observations emerges. With induction a researcher is expected to plunge himself into a natural setting so as to be able to fully and vividly describe the events as they happen or have happened and thereby being able to establish the causes of a phenomenon or behavior (Babbie, Mouton, Vorster & Prozesky, 1998; De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005; Judd, Smith & Kidder, 1991).

### *5.2 Research Sites*

The research sites for both case studies are found in the Manzini region. The main reason for picking this region is because it is the most densely populated region in Swaziland and thus it is believed to have the most MTN subscribers and to be representative of all the population groups in the country. Figure 1, highlights the places where the case studies were taken from.

The first case study was taken from two groups of households (each with ten), one rural and one urban: the rural one was taken along the Mliba road (this road is an 80 km stretch from the town of Manzini) and the urban one was taken from Manzini which is about 30 km from the capital, Mbabane. The second case study (which was dealing with rural youth) was taken from the Dvokolwako area which is about 80 km from the capital.

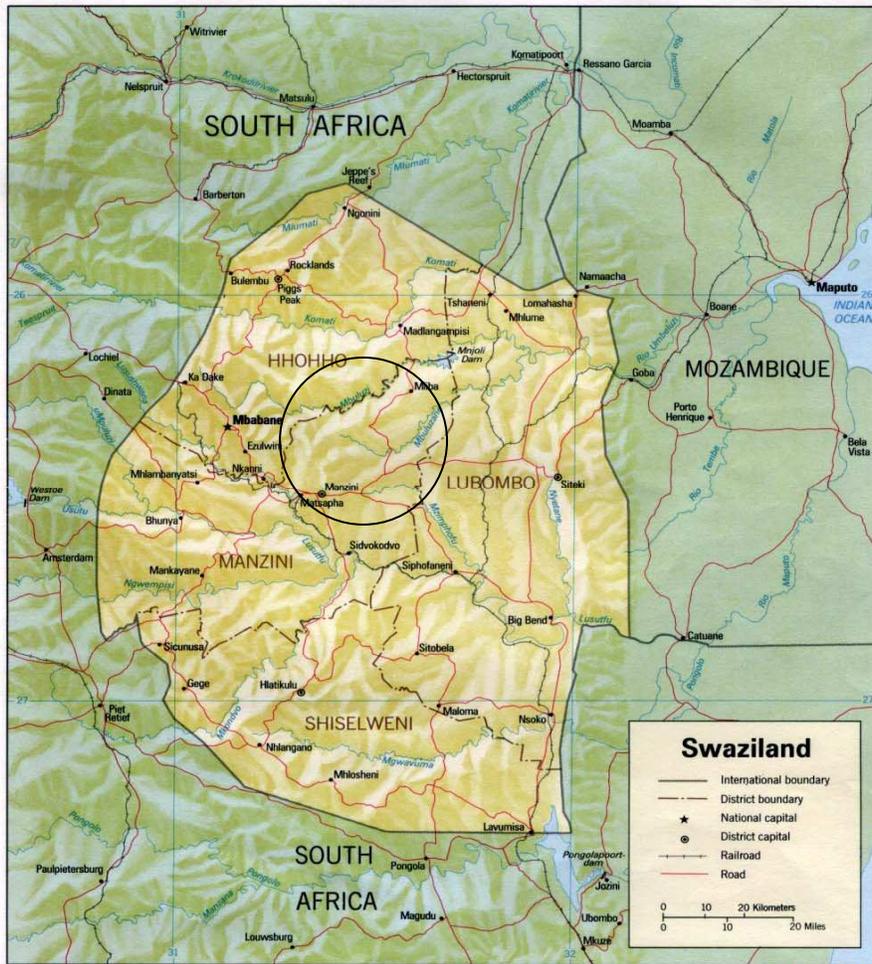


Figure 1: Map of Swaziland (Adapted from NationMaster.com)

### 5.3 Research strategy

This research uses the case study strategy. Snowball sampling was used to pick the participants in that at the end of each interview, the interviewee was asked to identify other potential participants.

**Case1:** The sample size of this case study was ten (for each group). Our participants ranged from 33 to 75 years of age in both the rural and urban groups. All our participants in the rural areas were involved in survivalist activities with no formal employment whiles our urban participants were either government servants or employed in the private sector. There was a balance of gender in both groups.

Ten rural households along the Mliba road (which has a large number of villages lying along it) were visited and then ten from the town of Manzini. The main reason for this was to establish the amount spent on mobiles (from buying the handset to buying airtime) in rural and urban areas so as to strengthen our claim for mobiles not being affordable to the rural poor and the 'emergence' of a mobile divide.

**Case 2:** This case which has a sample size of ten had participants ranging from 15 to 28 years of age. They were either school-going or unemployed. Seven of these participants were males; this was due to the fact that most female youths were not willing to disclose information about their usage of their mobiles.

This case focused on youths from the Dvokolwako area to determine the effects of mobiles e.g. morality, individualism and cosmopolitanism. This was done basically by looking at how they use their phones in terms of the applications, the number of texts they send over a given time period, the amount of reliance and trust they place on their mobiles and things that have changed in their lifestyles since they started using these gadgets e.g. new acquaintances.

#### *5.4 Research techniques*

The researcher visited all the research sites more than once and during these visits made some observations which are discussed later. Moreover, the researcher carried out some interviews (on first visit) which were not of formal nature and later administered questionnaires which were completed by the researcher himself. Lastly, reports from MTN and the government were also read.

#### *5.5 Data Analysis*

The analysis was done by harmonizing the responses for each and every question in the interviews and questionnaires. This was done by first identifying commonalities in the responses and then finding a way to present that common thought amongst the interviewees. Different thoughts were also represented.

In cases where the interviewee was supposed to give a figure, like the number of calls/SMSes, the amount spent on airtime or the cost of the handset, the average was calculated and then used in the discussion. Moreover, graphs were also used to present amounts spent buying the handset(s) and amounts spent on airtime monthly.

## 6. Case Studies

**Case1:** This case has two groups, rural and urban households.

### 6.1 Rural households

#### 6.1.1 Costs

The average price of the handsets is as high as E500-00 (considering their total monthly income), mostly being 2G Nokia phones that are used mainly and solely for calling and to some very limited extent, texting. One of the participants mentioned that she could not afford to buy the phone herself so her children did. Figure 2 shows the amount that was spent by each respondent to buy a mobile handset.

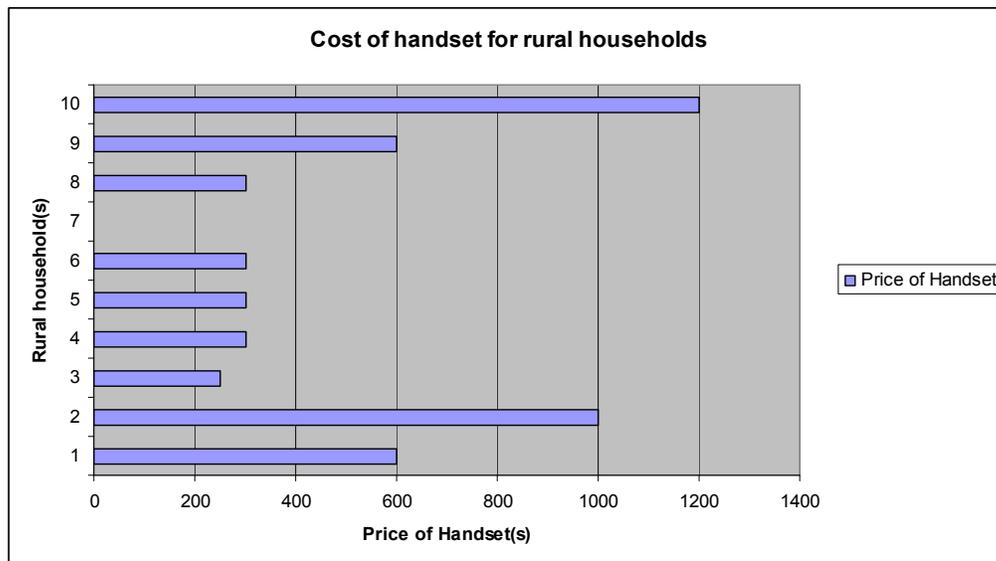


Figure 2: Cost of mobile handset for rural households (cost is zero if handset was a gift)

On average, rural households spend as high as E300-00 per month on airtime (see Figure 3 for the amount spent by each participant monthly) and were even shocked when they calculated the figure for us, because as they mentioned, this is a reasonable portion of their monthly income.

Generally, sixty percent of rural households make around six calls per day and for most (8 out of 10) of them a day passes without sending an SMS. One participant, an elderly woman, said:

*"I had no idea this was taking so much money from me, I recharge with R10-00 almost daily without noticing."*

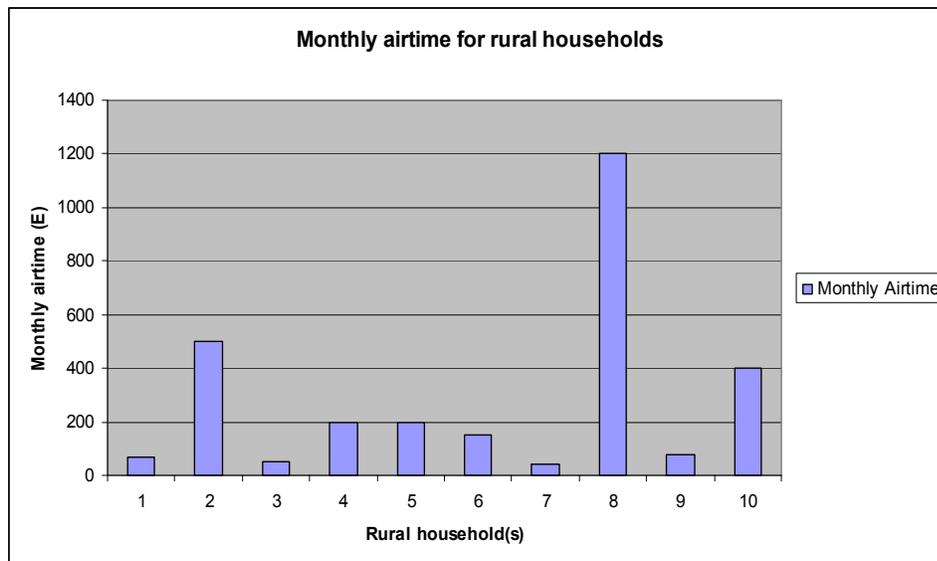


Figure 3: Cost of monthly airtime for rural households

### 6.1.2 Experiences and benefits

Six interviewed rural households started using mobiles around 2004; only one started using a mobile in 1998. Almost all (9 out of 10) of our respondents stated that they do not know how to use most of the functionalities in their phones, in fact some are still struggling to send SMSes (mostly women) and to retrieve numbers from their phone books. Only two participants (both male) told us that they have owned 3G phones before and they decided to down grade to 2G ones because they are easy to use.

The benefits that were highlighted by rural households included; easy communication (especially in times of emergencies) and reduced traveling costs. Moreover, we also gathered that reliance on the mobile is starting to pick up in rural households, as some of the respondents told us that they can find it difficult to cope in a day without these gadgets. When asked about what they

think should be improved by the service provider, they said MTN prices are so high and their discounts are so sporadic that weeks pass without getting any and even if they do make them available it is usually way after midnight.

## 6.2 Urban households

### 6.2.1 Costs

Handsets used by urban households are worth (on average) a staggering E2,500-00 (all being fancy 3G phones), with men owning the most expensive and the fanciest. Figure 4 shows the amount that was spent by each household to buy a cell phone.

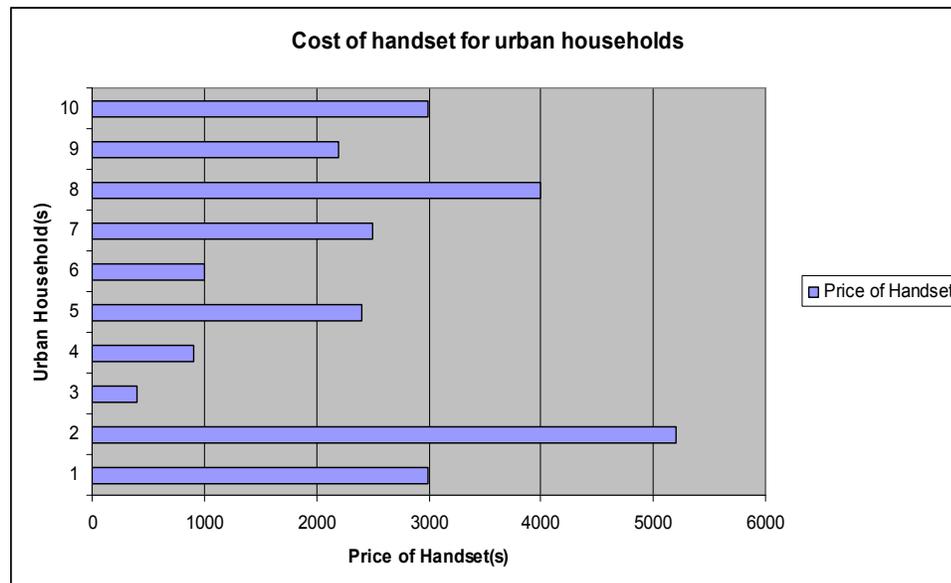


Figure 4: Cost of mobile handset for urban households

On average urban households spend E680-00 on air time per month (see Figure 5 for the amount spent by each participant monthly) and this is not a large portion of their monthly income, in fact one interviewee stated that airtime costs are almost negligible in his monthly expenditure. In any given day urban households make roughly ten calls and send five SMSes.

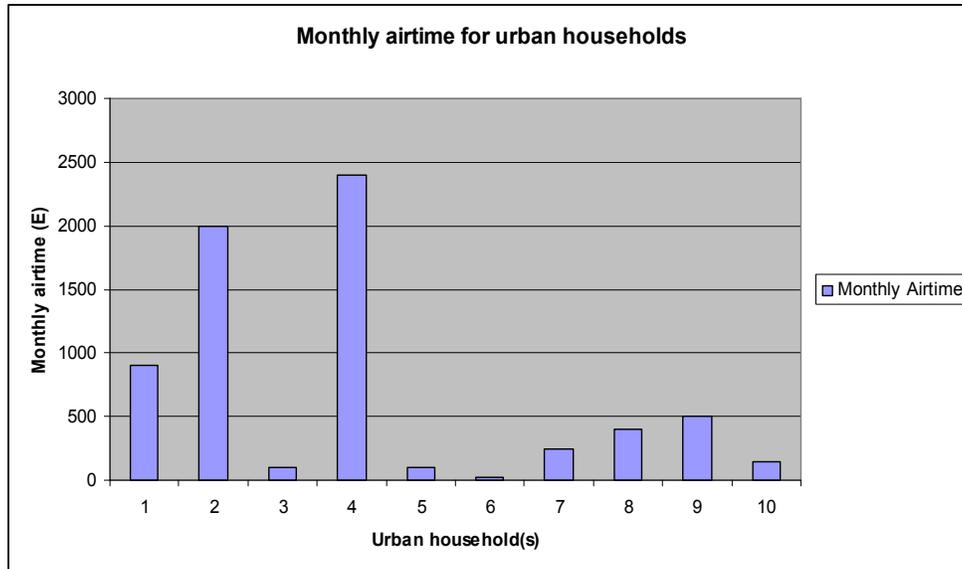


Figure 5: Cost of monthly airtime for urban households

### 6.2.2 Experiences and benefits

A majority of urban households (6 out of 10) started using mobiles as early as 1998. More than five of our participants highlighted that they have owned other 3G phones before but they had to buy new ones because they either got stolen or because they thought they are outdated. With urban households, the mobile is a way of boosting status hence it is ‘imperative’ that they own the latest and the fanciest phone available. Unlike with rural households, all but one of our interviewees use almost all the functionalities in their phones. A housewife who does not use most of the functionalities in her phone said:

*“Since my phone is so expensive it has so many functionalities which I do not use and when I want to use them I ask my children to show me because they know every functionality in my phone.”*

The reliance on the mobile in urban households is alarming. This is what two of our middle aged respondents (who are the highest spenders in air time) had to say:

*"My mobile is part of my hand, if it is not in my hand I feel like a part of me is missing, I carry it everywhere even to the bathroom."*

*"If I happen to forget my mobile at home in the morning I always take the trouble of driving back home to get it because a day is incomplete without it."*

When asked about what they think needs to be addressed by MTN all the respondents complained about network congestion, especially during peak hours and also adult content which is now made available to children e.g. pornography. The issue of prices and discounts was mentioned but not stressed as the other two issues. We gathered that the main benefits of the mobile is easy communication and being able to avoid people (just by sending an SMS).

**Case 2:** This case was focusing on the rural youth.

### *6.3 Rural youth*

#### *6.3.1 Costs*

Their phones which are all 3G, cost E800-00 on average (see Figure 6 for the amount that was spent by each respondent), which is high for the rural youth. Although the rural youth interviewed is either unemployed or still at school, we learnt that they all spend roughly E200-00 per month on airtime. Figure 7 shows the amount spent monthly on airtime by each respondent. As a result, on average they make about seven calls per day, mostly to friends (for most young men these are directed mostly to young women). The rural youth is not that enthusiastic about texting because they send roughly one SMS per day.

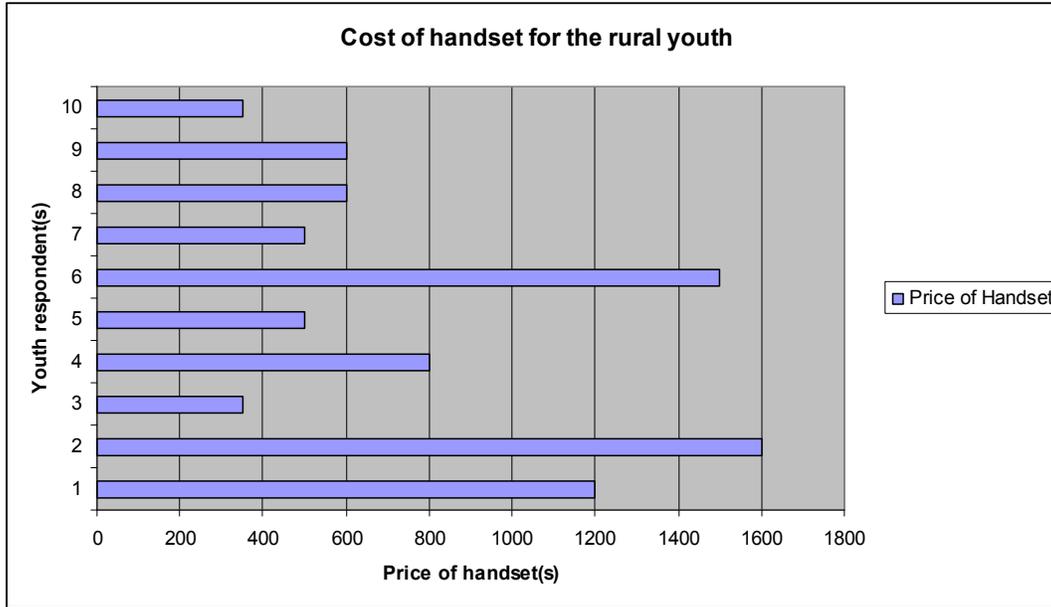


Figure 6: Cost of mobile handset for the rural youth

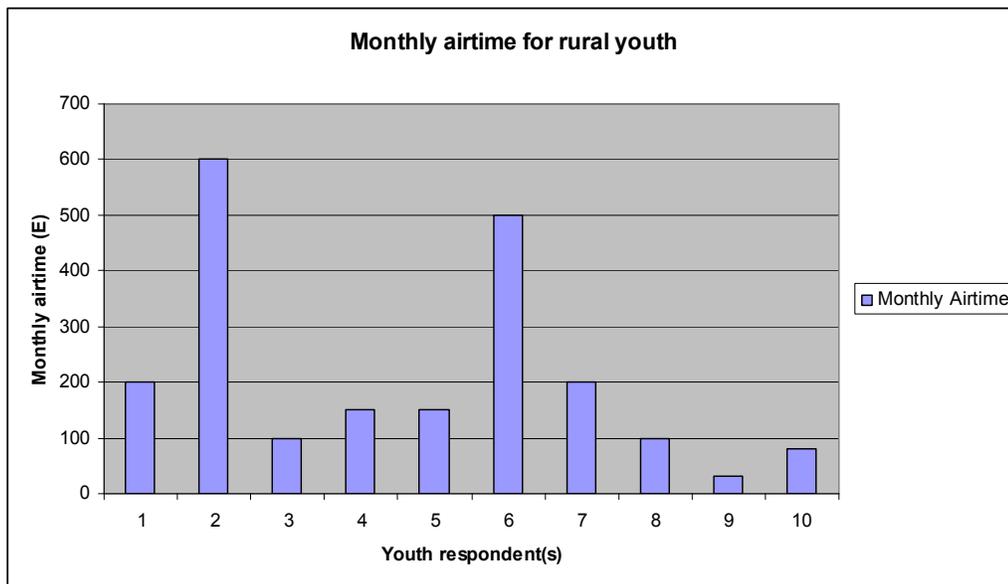


Figure 7: Cost of monthly airtime for the rural youth

### 6.3.2 Uses, experiences and 'benefits'

Over fifty percent of our respondents became 'connected' in 2006. Nine of our ten participants agreed to meeting new people ('new acquaintances') through the mobile, that is by using chatrooms and social sites like MySpace, QEEP, FaceBook, Mix-It and To-Go. Moreover, these

youngsters also mentioned that they subscribe to more than one of these and as a result most of their airtime is spent using these applications. They indicated that their major goal for chatting and socializing is mainly to meet city/town girls (for the young men) which they can end up dating and some do it to satisfy their sexual cravings. A twenty five year old man said:

*"A girl (based in Manzini) I met through QEEP has invited me over to her place so that we can meet and get to know each other. In fact we have talked about having sex for a longtime."*

In terms of foreign or urban influences, all but two claimed that they now have access to music, pictures, sports, videos, love messages and news, which they did not have access to before and are now a component of their lifestyles. That was not all, we then discovered that other than chatting and socializing, a majority (6 out of 10) of these young people spend most of their time on pornographic websites (even though it took a lot of effort to make them disclose that). One unashamed and open young man (18 years old) disclosed that:

*"I have seen pornography (on my phone) such that it is no longer a big deal for me; I am looking for new websites."*

All our interviewees agreed that the 'advantage' brought by the cyber space has resulted in limited physical contacts with people. They claimed that there is no need anymore to be traveling distances to see friends or even relatives if they can meet them on FaceBook. Eight of ten of our respondents agreed to frequently giving out their cell numbers to people.

All but one of our ten interviewees stated that they know how to use every functionality in their phones. From our conversations with them we gathered that all of them have never owned any other phone before (making the 3G gadgets they have being their first). A number of 'mobile-advantages' were highlighted by the rural youth, these included; easy communication, being able to avoid people they do not want to talk to, lying to parents, entertainment and also helping them to be organized e.g. in form of reminders etc. A nineteen year old young woman had this to say:

*"A mobile is good in that if my parents are away I can go and spend time with my boyfriend and if they call me I will just tell them that I am already in bed at home."*

## **7. Discussion of Findings**

### *7.1 Rural and urban households*

**Case 1:** From the above findings, rural households present a different case from urban households. It is actually quite clear that rural households are still at the early stages of adopting and harnessing this technology, just as Donner (2005) once pointed out. Urban households started using mobiles as early as 1998 (when they were still very expensive) while their rural counterparts started mostly in 2004.

Other than the un-predictable survivalist activities that rural households engage in (Heeks, 2008) and the unreliable remittances from relatives in town, the government grant (which is small but reliable) for the rural poor ranges from E300-00 to E500-00 every three months (Government of Swaziland, 2006) while their urban counterparts (who are mostly civil servants) make above E6000-00 per month. This huge disparity brings to the limelight the issue of affordability.

From looking at the amount spent on buying the handsets to buying services like airtime it becomes visibly clear that rural households are still finding it very difficult to comfortably afford mobiles (Gillwald, 2010). Rural households use 2G mobiles that cost as little as E500-00 (which some of them came as gifts from relatives or children living in town) and buy airtime worth E300-00 per month while urban ones spend as high as E2,500-00 buying fancy 3G mobiles and then airtime at the value of E700-00 per month (more than twice what rural households spend).

One would argue that it is by choice that rural households are using this expensive technology, but the truth of the matter is mobiles have a 'can't-do-without' status such that it has become very difficult for the rural poor to just ignore. They now use them to ask for remittances from their children in town and to get news (from their relatives) of when they will get their social grants in their constituencies, so basically mobiles have been 'strategically' positioned such that even those who do not afford them have to strive to.

Rural households were even uneasy to disclose the amount they spend monthly on airtime because it is a significant portion of the little income they make. Furthermore, when asked about what they think should be improved by MTN, they all (rural interviewees) complained about the high prices and the sporadic discounts while their urban counterparts complained a lot about network congestion and in passing about the high prices and rare discounts. The issue of affordability is also evident in the number of calls and SMSes between urban and rural households.

One other issue that is emerging with the adoption of mobiles is that of a new 'mobile divide'. From the findings of this case study, urban households are moving faster in harnessing and putting these technologies into good use. This is not the case with just mobiles but with all other technologies e.g. computers. The 'mobile-benefits' that urban households outline are far reaching than those of rural ones who just stated easy communication (especially when asking for remittances) as the main 'mobile-benefit'. Urban households have tangible 'testimonies' about mobiles like getting good jobs and accommodation (through adverts), security, conference calls, organizing meetings and tracking their children etc. Urban households have fully integrated mobiles in their lifestyles such it would be impossible for them to cope without them.

Arun, Heeks and Morgan (2004) once pointed out in their Indian case studies that ICTs in developing countries are not gender neutral; mobiles, as expected, have been successful in introducing this trend. These gadgets have brought about gender inequalities that are slowly becoming visible. When considering the rural and the urban households separately you learn that within each group there are clear signs of gender inequality. Men in both groups are the better users of these technologies (they understand almost all the functionalities in their devices) hence they own the most expensive and the fanciest phones and they are the greatest spenders when it comes to airtime. As a result of this, men therefore stand a good chance of making more profitable use of mobiles than woman.

## *7.2 Rural youth*

**Case 2:** The rural youth seems to be the leaders in mobile usage in the rural areas. This is because they (like some adults in rural areas) started using these gadgets in 2006 and they unlike

their parents (the rural households) they use 3G phones which are expensive than those used by their parents (E800-00). Although, this group does not have any source of income but somehow they make means to organize E200-00 per month which they spend on airtime. One major question is, do these youths go to all this trouble of organizing airtime and buying 3G phones just for the sake of it or for some important reason?

A technology determinist would say awarding mobiles absolute primacy is a step in the right direction for any developing country (McGuigan, 2005; Thompson, 2004). But after hearing and seeing the ‘transformations’ that these have caused in rural areas (especially to the youth) one then wonders if these gadgets are really worth the unwarranted and undying attention that they are receiving.

Pertierra (2005) talks about discursive intimacy, where two individuals who have never met suddenly become intimate friends who even go to the extent of talking and doing pretty much everything including sex. A majority of the rural youth we interviewed made quite clear that they have met new ‘acquaintances’ in the many chatrooms that they subscribe to. One of them went extent of telling us that he is organizing money to go to the city in order to meet a girl he met on FaceBook. The problem of discursive intimacy is not just the only problem, there is also that of pornographic websites which have exposed these youngsters to x-rated contents which have influenced them to indulge in many improper activities.

In a country like Swaziland with a high rate of HIV/Aids one can safely attribute these alarming HIV/Aids rates to mobiles, because young people end up having illicit sex with strangers, thanks to chatrooms and the web which they would not have access to if there was no global mobile ‘conviction’. Moreover, the other problem is that those youths (young women) who come from very poor families who do not afford to buy them these devices are then forced to hook up with older strangers (older men) who can at least help them get ‘connected’ lest they get left out in this mobile ‘crusade’.

Issues of cosmopolitanism and individualism (Pertierra, 2005) are also very clear. Our respondents claimed that they now have access to foreign music, news, videos, pictures and love

messages which are all from the city. It goes without saying that they do not have a chance of exporting their rural experiences to the city, it is always the other way round and slowly they are being 'transformed' by these urban influences. Furthermore, now that they have access to these gadgets they also do not spend much time mingling with other people because they see no point in physical interactions if they can interact on cyber space. Our interviewees seemed to enjoy the concept of 'absent presence' (like Pertierra (2005) once predicted) where they interact with absent people as though they were physically with them.

## **8. Conclusion**

Firstly, this paper sought to prove that mobiles are unaffordable to the rural poor. Secondly, that a mobile 'divide' is emerging since urban people are ahead of their rural counterparts in terms of adopting and using mobiles. Lastly, that the introduction of mobiles has worn out the moral fibre in societies (even rural ones) and also that they have introduced problems of individualism and cosmopolitanism.

These above objectives have been met in that the study has shown that the rural poor who still rely on government grants and unreliable remittances or survivalist activities are still finding it difficult to cope with the high mobile costs. Moreover, we stated that urban people have tangible 'testimonies' about their mobiles which rural people are still far from having, this is a sign that the proposed mobile 'divide' is already emerging. Finally, the study revealed the kind of youth 'transformations' that have been brought by mobiles and as a result it is apparent that mobiles are the source of moral decay and other social problems such as the escalating HIV/Aids rate.

As the case studies have shown, there is still a lot of techno-centric mentality in many spheres of the society (Vosloo & Chigona, 2010). Mobiles are still viewed as devices of the modern age that will help developing countries fight their many problems. But what emanates from the case studies above is different; mobiles do not deserve the 'saint' status they seem to be enjoying all over the world. From their problems of being unaffordable (Donner, 2005) to the many social problems (Pertierra, 2005; McGuigan, 2005) and also gender inequality one can safely say that mobiles are really not worth the 'heavy burden' that they have been given by some researchers, NGOs and governments.

Lastly, mobiles continue to widen the gap (socially and economically) between the rural poor and urban dwellers ('mobile divide'). Sooner or later a situation will emerge where the technology determinists will see the need for spending resources in order to close this gap that has been deliberately created by these gadgets. In light of all the evidence that has been presented this paper therefore concludes that mobiles do not deserve the status the world has given them.

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## Appendix

### Urban Households

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Age (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Questions:

1) Since when have you been having a cell phone?

\_\_\_\_\_

2) What is the price of your current cell phone?

\_\_\_\_\_

3) What type of cell phone do you have?

\_\_\_\_\_

4) Do you make use of all the functionalities in your cell phone?

\_\_\_\_\_

5) Which is the fanciest cell phone you have ever had?

\_\_\_\_\_

6) How much do you spend on your cell phone per month?

\_\_\_\_\_

7) How many calls do you make per day?

\_\_\_\_\_

8) How many text messages do you send per day?

\_\_\_\_\_

9) What benefits have you realized since you had a cell phone?

\_\_\_\_\_

10) Would it be a normal day without your cell phone? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_

11) What do you think needs to be addressed on mobile telecommunications in Swaziland?

\_\_\_\_\_

12) What do you think are the solutions to these problems?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Rural Households**

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Age (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions:**

1) Since when have you been having a cell phone?

\_\_\_\_\_

2) What is the price of your current cell phone?

\_\_\_\_\_

3) What type of cell phone do you have?

\_\_\_\_\_

4) Do you make use of all the functionalities in your cell phone?

\_\_\_\_\_

5) Which is the fanciest cell phone you have ever had?

\_\_\_\_\_

6) How much do you spend on your cell phone per month?

\_\_\_\_\_

7) How many calls do you make per day?

\_\_\_\_\_

8) How many text messages do you send per day?

\_\_\_\_\_

9) What benefits have you realized since you had a cell phone?

\_\_\_\_\_

10) Would it be a normal day without your cell phone? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_

11) What do you think needs to be addressed on mobile telecommunications in Swaziland?

\_\_\_\_\_

12) What do you think are the solutions to these problems?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Rural Youths**

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Age (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions:**

1) Since when have you been having a cell phone?

\_\_\_\_\_

2) What is the price of your current cell phone?

\_\_\_\_\_

3) What type of cell phone do you have?

\_\_\_\_\_

4) Do you make use of all the functionalities in your cell phone?

\_\_\_\_\_

5) Which is the fanciest cell phone you have ever had?

\_\_\_\_\_

6) How much do you spend on your cell phone per month?

\_\_\_\_\_

7) How many calls do you make per day? What kind? To whom?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8) How many text messages do you send per day? What kind? To whom?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9) What benefits have you realized since you had a cell phone?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10) What has changed in your life since you started using a cell phone? e.g. new acquaintances and new relationships.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

11) Are there any foreign or urban influences that have been brought by this gadget? Things that are done in town that you were not doing before?

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12) Which applications do you use the most? e.g. internet, mix-it, facebook, twitter etc. And doing what?

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13) Are there any bad influences that have come with your mobile phone? Please state.

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14) Since you had your cell phone has your meeting with friends or relatives been limited, since you can now be with them virtually in cyber space?

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15) How often do you give out your number? To what kind of people?

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