Recasting the potential of mobile phones for gender equality

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The mobile phenomenon

- Mobile market penetration ► Economic growth

- Mobile is a multi-functional device

- What does it mean for the bottom of the pyramid and especially for marginalised women?

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Analytical frameworks

- Informational, associational and communicative powers

- Mobility, connectivity and hybridity

Methodology

Techno-social debates, information society debates, case studies

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Sociological shifts

- Individually-owned asset

- Blurring of time and space

- Individual autonomy – safe autonomy

- Blurring of private and public – lives an livelihoods

Mobile phones as a vehicle for market extension

1. Logic: extension of network will result in reduced informational asymmetries and market inefficiencies.

2. Development a by product- job creation, economic opportunities etc.

3. Integrating labour into the neo-liberal global order.

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Mobile phones as democracy enhancing tool for the government

1. Tapping the 'always-on' citizen.

2. M-gov – E-gov – good governance

3. Pre-requisite of existing mobile network, inheriting inequities of access.

4. Techno-deterministic managerial principles

5. Imagined digital space as post gender

a. Invisibilising material realities of women

b. Rejecting progressive politics and governance moves.

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Mobile phones as community centred development tools

1. Identity beyond the 'user' and content which is supportive and collaborative as against provisioning of services.

2. Enabling new constellations of communities.

3. Mobile embedded in 'human' not other way around.

4. Use determined by industry norms and govt. regulation.

Mobile phones for empowerment

1. Can shift social power relationships and facilitate institutional transformation towards the realisation of rights of marginalised groups eg political mobilisation and activism.

2. Politics of dissent and resistance by campaigns and movements.

3. Anonymity and surveillance – focused persecution of dissidents

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Political economy

1. Origins of architecture and principles determining technology

- Internet: academic origins; amorphous promotes freer flow of information, interaction on equal terms. Allows for co-constructive knowledge systems and collaborative production systems.

- Mobile phones: Proprietary networks market determined with central points of control.

- Mobile networks less, competitive, generative, protective of privacy.

- Difficult to perceive if progressive celebrated behaviour of the internet can be replicated in mobile network.

Political economy

2. Network neutrality

- Service provision based on market feasibility to network provider.

- Lock-ins: Device comes with vendor lock-ins, provisioning access based on gains for the telecom industry.

- Outcome is 'Publicness' compromised- possible scenario of 'internet free for those who can afford it and not free for those who cannot afford it'.

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In conclusion

1. Return to the initial feminist - IS framework, our concerns lie in:

a. Framing the network such as to ensure the re-alignment of informational, associational and communicative powers in favour of the marginalised subject.

b. Mobility, connectivity and hybridity issues addressed through supporting informational commons and public information; network neutral ecologies.

A shift of perception where we recast the mobile for development debate to enable the mobile female subject – not the female user of the mobile.

Thank you!

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