



Mobipedias,
Moving Targets:
Why we aren't there yet

an ethnography of North American
mobile use and disuse, 2007-8

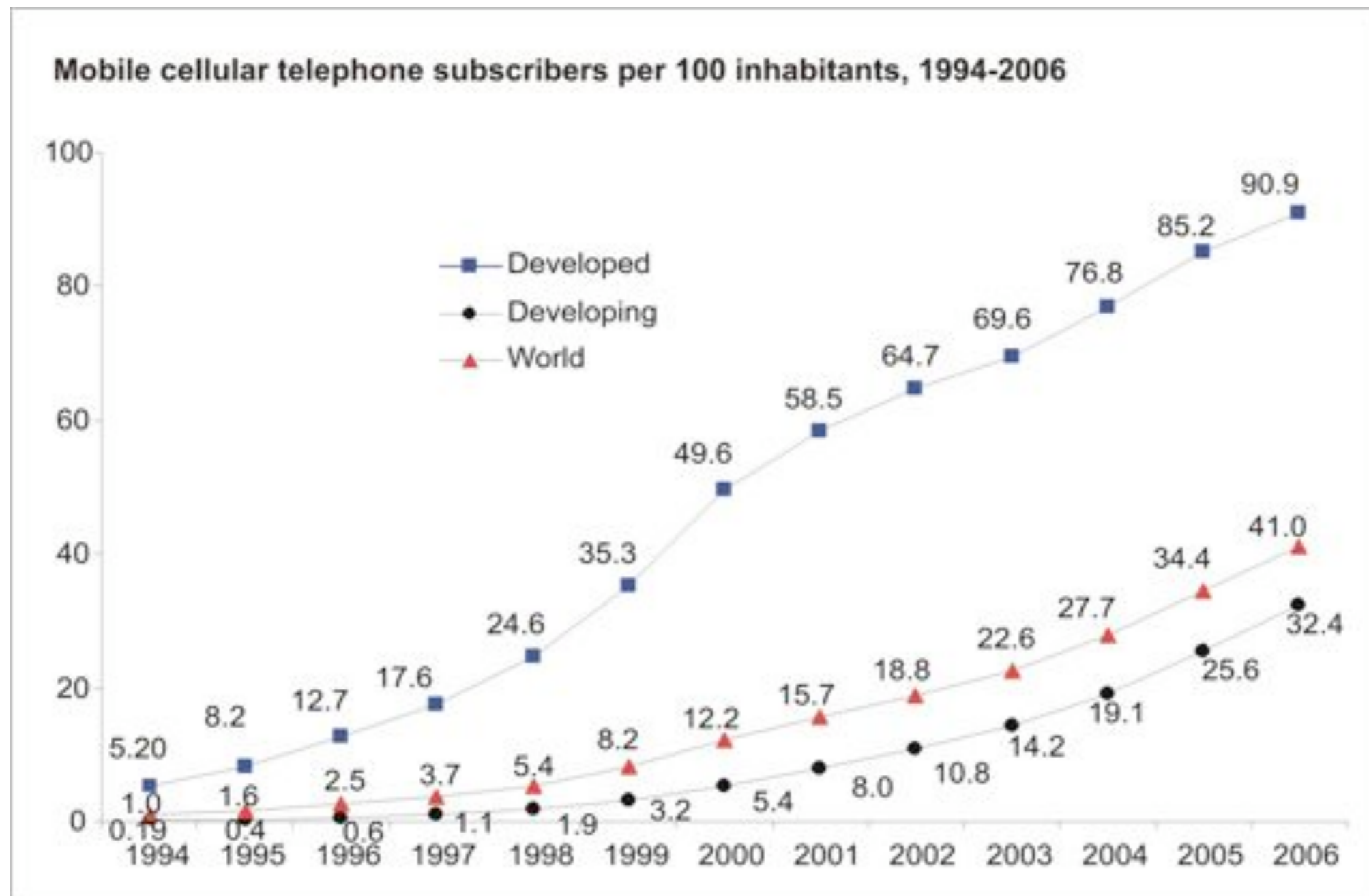
who am I? Phd candidate in CMNS, emphasis on ethnography of tech use, esp in creative sectors.



the mobile wordpress workshop yesterday – reflective of mobile web adoption/interest? heh.

while we are adopting mobiles rapidly, we're falling behind much of the ROTW in terms of what we use them for (we use them for voice and text mainly). interest in the mobile web is low. why?

Global mobile phone adoption rates (2006)



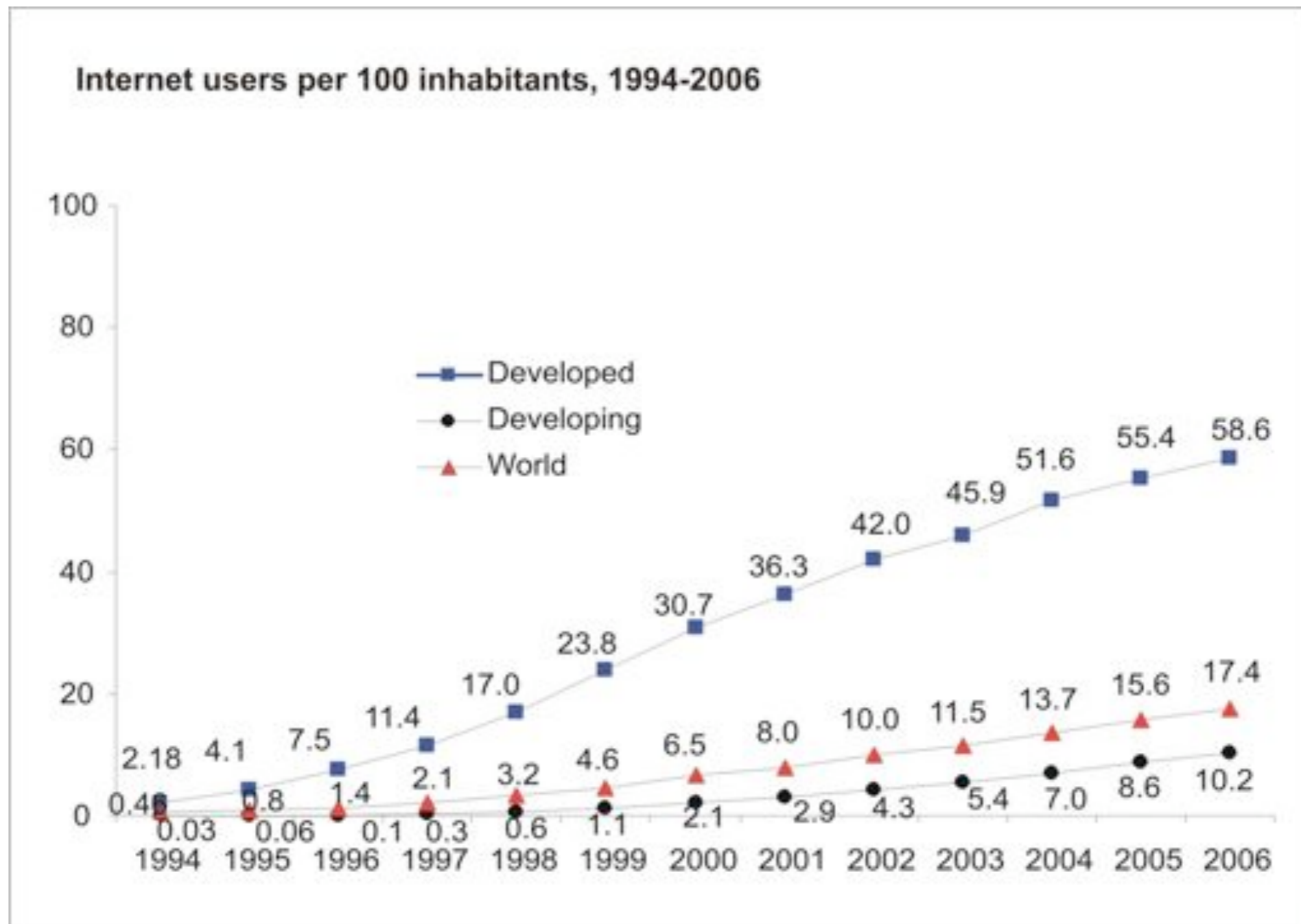
Source: International Telecommunications Union

you're probably familiar with images like this, depicting the digital divide

this is merely one statistic we can use to compare – 90 subscribers per 100 in the developed world, 32 per 100 in the developing world.

China: Penetration rate of PC: 8% – Mobile Phone 30% (Sources: World Bank, "Africa: The impact of mobile phones – March 2005", "Market Trends: PC Penetration Data Highlights Market Maturity, Gartner April 2005" and "Universal Access Report by GSM Association, October 2006")

...as compared to Internet adoption



Source: International Telecommunications Union

problem orientation: comparatively, mobile adoption is weak in Canada/US as compared with ROTW.

internet adoption: while 2004 saw 58 per 100 users in the developed world (this is much higher in Canada – more like 90+), the developing world only has 10 per 100 (and the world as a whole has 17 per 100).

Japan, Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, all have the highest mobile internet adoption rates (Castells et al 2007, p26)

Why a Mobile Divide btw NAmerica and ROTW?

- not just carrier/landline cost/access issues
- not *simply* the broadband penetration rates (e.g., a competing, well-developed platform on IP nets)
- what social expectations have been built up in the past 20+ years of US-centric media?



we often reduce the problem of mobile adoption to two premises: (1) preexistence of cheap landlines and (2) carrier policies on data rates.

a competing virtual space - the IP-networked laptop/desktop world

US and Canada lag behind the developing world in adoption of mobile services generally

US and Canada lag behind the rest of the developed world (EU, Asia) on adoption rates for advanced services.

Why a Mobile Divide btw N America and ROTW?



photo credit: nathangibbs, <http://flickr.com/photos/nathangibbs>



photo credit: caribb, <http://flickr.com/photos/caribb>

Sociocultural differences

public/private space

public/private property

public/private transportation

but there are also cultural and social reasons why users have not adopted advanced mobile services in Canada - or at least these factors have implications for what our style of adoption will be

-competing IP ecosystem of apps and services (not accessed as much in ROTW)

-users accustomed to tethered, time-shifted lifestyles in N America - not mobile, not nomadic, not public space or transit users (as in Japan or Germany, where this is the norm, and where mobile adoption is far higher)

North Americans have a different use for public space, something referred to by sociologist Raymond Williams as "mobile privatisation". We prefer the ear buds to the sound system (Bull 2004).

consider something Marshall McLuhan wrote in 1989-

"Canadians and Americans share something very precious: a sense of the last frontier. the Canadian North has replaced the American West. that primeval woodland, that vast wilderness is there, from Banff to Newfoundland, giving all North Americans a spatial habitation Europeans do not know. for two centuries, at least, the frontier has taught us how to go out alone.

As it did for nineteenth-century plainsmen, going out to be alone raises the ultimate question: who am I? We remove ourselves from the anonymity of the crowd... "The North American goes to the movies or the theater to be alone with his date, whereas Europeans go to enjoy the audience."

(*The Global Village*, p.147-157)



this is how we view it



this is how most people get around



this is how we get around



photo credit: Thomas Hawk, photographing the exterior of a public building in SF, gets harassed by security guards, here, giving him the finger. photogs routinely find themselves restricted from capturing images of public life, whilst governments and corporations are free to place surveillance cameras ubiquitously, with impunity.

from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/51035555243@N01/130601011/>

But we make choices, collectively, about how media are used. If we tolerate this, then our children will be next – we're giving up the commons for propriety and paranoia.

“One day I believe we will regard cities which funneled cars and people together as something as barbaric and retrograde as cities that featured public floggings and hangings in the central square.” - Momus

songwriter turned blogger Momus, encouraging us all to become flaneurs “who loiter, annoy another person or make unsolicited remarks of an offensive, disgusting or insulting nature” (instead of pumping CO2 into public air)

NAmericans spend much time in private space. we have an evaporating public sphere, despite the one that seems to exist on IP based networks.

we're interested in safety and security when it comes to mobiles. these have been the dominant themes in adoption rationales (our data and that of others bear this out). for some reason we're afraid of being stranded on a highway, and so we get a mobile phone account. or we're afraid of being caught cornered by thugs in the DTES, a situation from which a mobile will save us.

what a strange culture.



photo credit: Susie Gardner



photo credit: Eleanor Smith

Imbrications of physical and virtual: how North Americans configure their “third space”

we undertook research in the summer and autumn of 2007, looking closely at how and why North American urban mobile device users capture, share, and consume mobile rich media.

(following Ito, Rheingold, and others) mobile internet space can be seen as a “third space” of copresent media creation – ideally enhancing and supporting interactions in physical, public spaces – in contrast to tethered rich media (PCs, web browsers, social networking sites), which contribute to (for better or worse) an “asynchronous culture” – wherein media are situated as distractions.

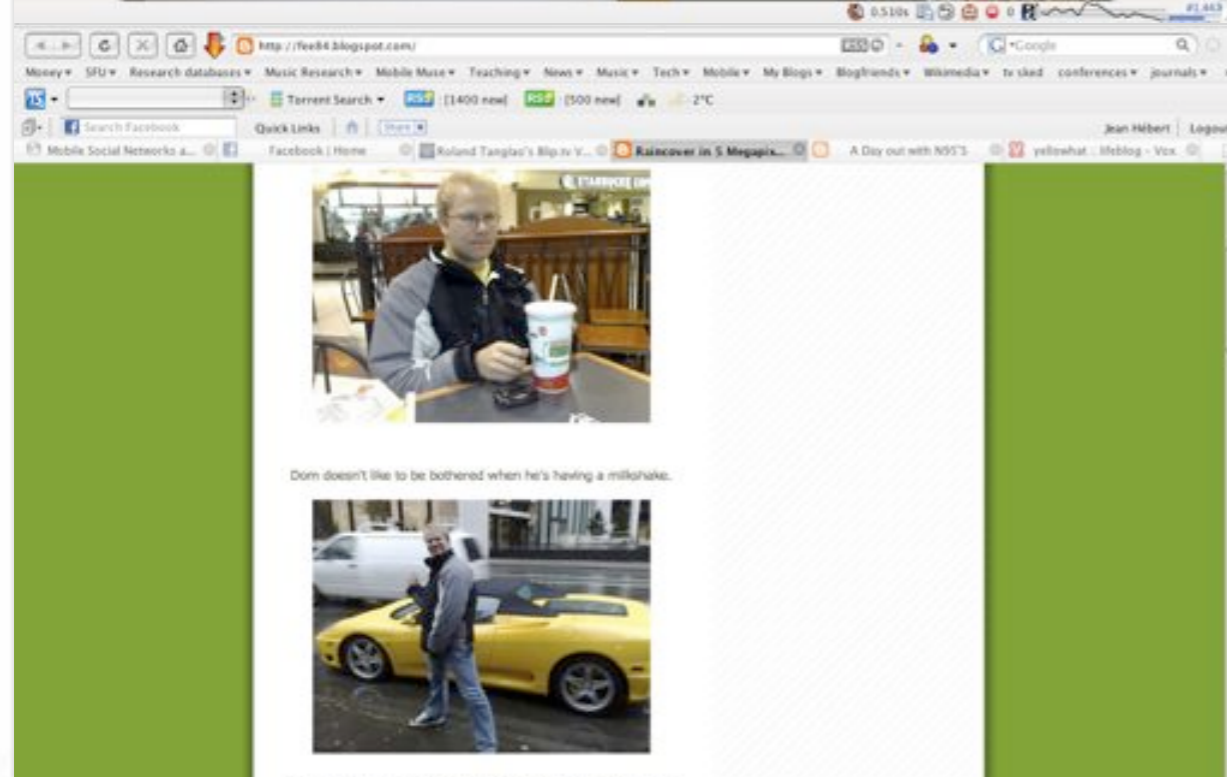
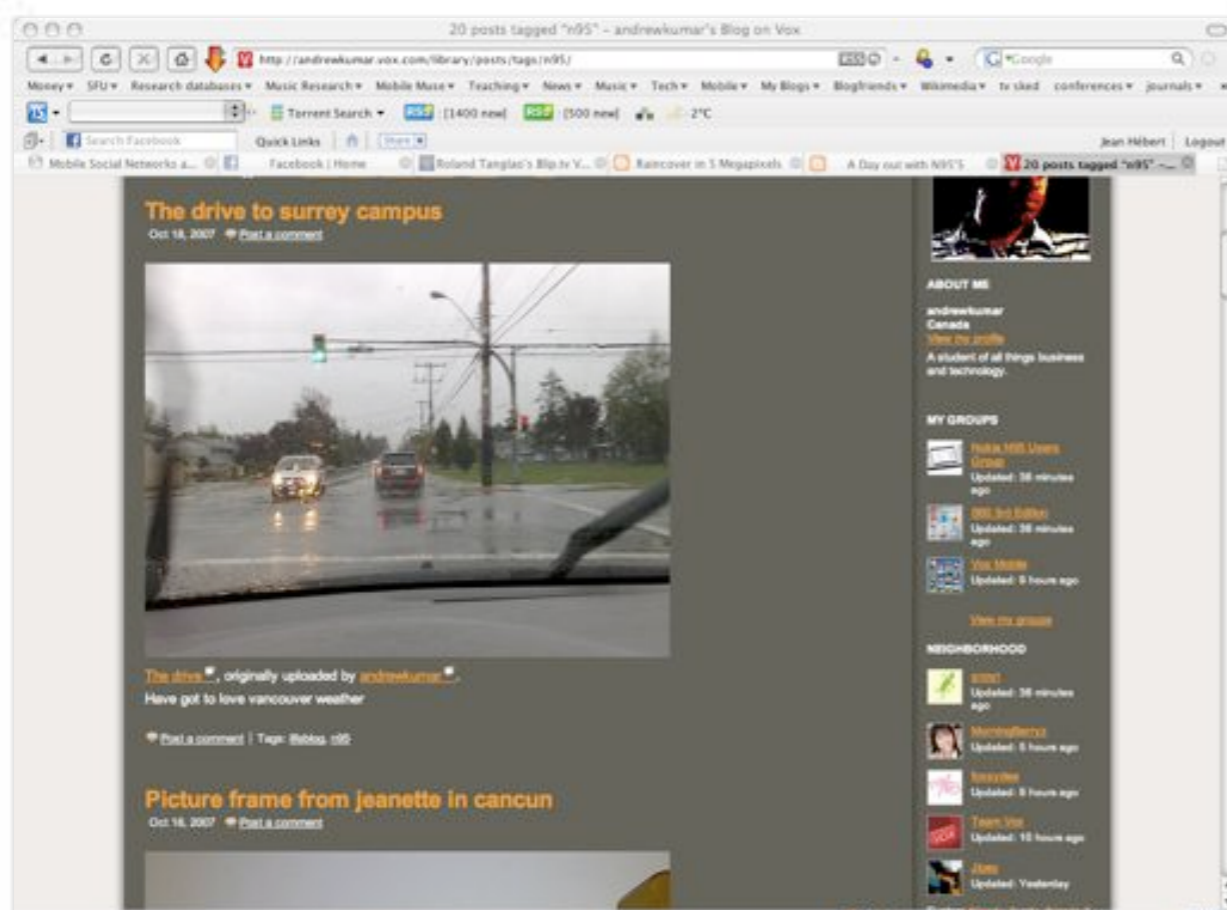
The compulsion of capture

why we capture the things we do

photo credit: Kris Krüg, <http://flickr.com/photos/kk>



this study poses questions about “why we capture” and “why we share” to a group that is teetering on the brink of mobile adoption



The Seduction of sharing: where, how, and why we share

we discuss the implications of asynchronous culture on media capture practices and sharing practices

we also discuss the various barriers to user immersion in synchronous media experiences in North America and suggest directions for future research.

Research Methodology

- emphasis on organic groups of friends
- subject-driven ethnographic data collection: blogs, photo, Facebook, tagging
- frequent discussion groups and videography of subject's daily lives
- Two phases: "taste test" and participant observation
 - *"taste test"*: participants given Nokia N95s for one week with (variably) specified instructions on what to do
 - *participant observation*: participants accompanied by researchers on outings, weekly interviews, bi-weekly discussion groups - 6 weeks of "immersion"

Taste test phase - methodology

Week 1: no software, no task	Week 2: no software, specific task
Week 3: software, no task	Week 4: software and specific task

for groups given software, we used Widsets, Jaiku, and Shozu

other groups were given the default Nokia N95 settings

each group (self-selecting groups of five friends) was either specifically told to “attend an event together and photoblog about it” or was not given this instruction at all.

Participant observation methodology

- open structure
- longer duration
- most data (media) collection is crowdsourced
- transparency of research questions and methods
- blurring of researcher and researched



a group of four “mobile power users” was recruited (all of whom know each other) and photoblogged their experiences over a six week period.

photos and videos created and shared by the group were tagged using lifeworld categories derived from TEDA (Onufrijchuk, 2004) and analyzed in these terms.

there are obvious gaps in the lifeworld represented by this “asynchronous” representation of these users’ mobile lives – note that “family”, “relaxation” and “conviviality” are underrepresented in the data (as shown in relative size of tags, which represents the frequency with which images were tagged with each category)

So why capture?



Having crowdsourced our data collection methods, one of our subjects turns her camera onto her friends – asking “why do you capture photographs with your phone?”

So why Share?



Roland and Kris here discuss the merits of social media as a feedback into personal media management (and by extension, self-presentation).

What changes when your media goes mobile?



Roland explains here how his aesthetic practice is altered (at least temporarily) because of limitations in the N95 (time lag on the camera). Roland has adopted a slash n burn photography style echoed by the style of capture of this clip – videotaping a moving target while on a moving bicycle.

Mobile media use and sharing is just like that. While conventional SNS, blogging and photoblogging are like sitting in a room having a conversation around a photo album, perhaps with a camera on hand, mobile media is more like videotaping a moving target while on a moving bicycle, and making the proceeds instantly available.

Major Findings

- compulsion to share media is entwined with the need to structure information, to reorganize the presentation of self and story
- users actively choose whether this is personally controlled (blogging) or socially distributed (friends comments and tags relied upon to provide context)
- users actively and immediately personalise new devices whatever their level of technical familiarity with mobile devices (whether ringtones, skins or apps)

given specific instructions, users made more creative use of their mobile devices: both groups instructed to "attend something together, capture, and share media from the event" did several things:

(1) created multiple fictional narratives on a few separate blogs based on the photos taken

(2) staged a self-consciously artificial "sleepover" for the benefit of the study - again, an attempt to create a fictional narrative out of captured media

in contrast, users not told what to do

(3) approached their week with the phones as an exercise in creating something useful, though convenient (given busy schedules) (photoblogging their commutes), or

(4) didn't carry out any structured group activity - simply going about their week and posting photos to a group - again, photoblogging their commute, mainly, but unsystematically so.

no users adopted the widget software installed on phones. in all but one group, users actively and quickly modified their phones (though the level of technical competence in doing so was unevenly distributed across and within groups) - ranged from ringtone transfer to software installation.

Major Findings

- users are habituated to asynchronous lifestyles, but are edging toward the synchronous
- challenges to mobile internet adoption:
 - personal (habituation to asynchronous media such as email/blogs)
 - technical (configuring shozu, time lag on cameraphones)
 - aesthetic/cultural barriers - conventions around rich media use (IP, expectations about surveillance and privacy)
 - (cost)

Implications

- small bytes of data
- small screens and handset innovation
- privacy/publicity notions challenged
- revisioning the public sphere and the right to communicate

expectations of NAmericans will need adapt to smaller bytes of data useful in mobile contexts

the expectations for larger displays and keypads could drive handset design & innovation in new directions

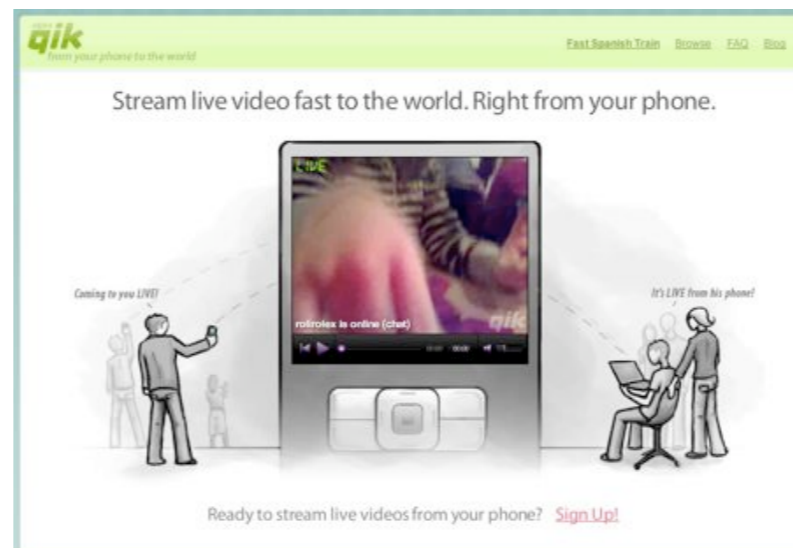
recasting the public sphere, publicity and privacy

revisioning expectations, in turn, about rights to communicate, rights to public space

The Mososo future - Same Network, Many Devices and Protocols

twitter

ShoZu
Your Cellphone. Your Media. Your Way.



facebook
Mobile



Consola

mososo trend: same web, many protocols.
phones connect to computers via bluetooth/infrared/USB
phones connect to Internet via GPRS/wi-fi
computers connect to Internet via wi-fi
mobiles for tagging and capturing, computers for lengthier text and organizing/storing media

in countries such as Canada, we can expect to see very interesting results - where many users will likely have the resources to maintain both mobile and tethered access to the same web.

Current/Future Research

1. *break the habituation*. make a specific task - immersion in synchronous media use/sharing
 - Fearless City project (funded by Mobile Muse) - equipping DTES artists/residents with handheld mobile computers to accomplish community defined goals
2. *comparative survey research*. how is mobile media sharing done differently in different cultural contexts (Vancouver and Beijing)



www.mobilemuse.ca

blog: <http://clicknoise.net>

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