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# 'Mental Kartha Hai' or 'Its Blowing my Mind': Evolution of the Mobile Internet in an Indian Slum

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*This paper is an ethnographic exploration of on-line practices of teens in a slum in Hyderabad, India. It is also an attempt to develop concepts for building a novel user model in unique socio-technical ecology. We examine how teenagers relate to the internet, develop expertise, and engage themselves in a socio-technical universe of family, peers, and locality. As ethnographers we look for qualitative indicators embedded in broader social and cultural ecologies of youth engagement with the mobile internet. We identify learning, innovation and self-perception of internet use as modes of everyday negotiation between both rising usage desires and stringent costs.*

## INTRODUCTION

The mobile phone finds pride of place in the media ecosystem of contemporary Indian teenager's. Youth living in urban slums are no exception. With little to spare upon 'always on' Internet enabled devices, they lead digital lives accessed on mobile phone piece-meal and apportioned among peers in everyday communicative behaviours Such 'digital lives' speaks to the conference theme of 'evolution and revolution' foregrounding teens in an urban slum leapfrogging digital technologies, as they participate in and re-characterize the genre of virtual life: a leap discontinuous and disruptive, revolutionizing the media ecology of these teenagers. Indeed, for many of them the mobile phone is the inaugural personal gateway to a world of multi-media communications, entertainment and sociality.

Teenagers of Hafeezpet are expanding the 'fixtures of teen-hood': friendship, communication, play and self-expression (Boyd 2007), through the infrastructural ecology of an informal urban squatter settlement. To understand youth as techno-agents in a social world is to understand the groundedness of technology in actual contexts of engagement and incorporation. How is the slum, as social geography, shaping their experience of internet as technology? As in other documented contexts, [Ito et al 2009], teen internet usage is about self-directed engagements with on-line content for pleasure, knowledge and perpetual social contact. What is unique to this story are the paths traipsed to forge an always on and perpetual contact with digital life.

We use two abstractions derived from the contexts of youth-technology practices to identify and represent habituations of the mobile internet in the lives of teens from Hafeezpet. These are anchored in the following contemplations: 1. imagining of an '*on demand internet*' rather than 'always on' internet

and 2. forging of '*persisting internet'* rather than 'perpetual internet'. They are situational, relational and draw on teen fascinations of on-line experiences. As Kulbeer, age 16, said:

> "Mental kartha hai… when I am on-line, I am like blown away… I want to experience and download as much before my pre-paid times."

Our paper will focus on these fascinations explicitly linking on-line experiences with off-line social contingencies not only enabling but animating the status of digital embodiment. Social contingencies are many; the crucial being expensing internet, creating social value for internet time and media sharing practices. These profoundly influence experiences of the internet by teens inhabiting spaces restrained by infrastructural snares. Our story is also about alternate infrastructures modifying constraining ecologies to endowing ecologies. We use the notion of a social *'street corner' internet* to articulate the infusion of digital life into a cramped tech-ecology. The street corner is a resilient eco-system subsisting on clued-in, wired-in and networked human infrastructure to create and endure *on demand* and *the persisting* internet. It consists of a family of digital experts, novices, interns and wannabes learning, teaching, immersing in-context technology for everyday use. The street corner is the hub of internet technology dispersal in the slum community channeled by the dint of teen agency.

The initial reference to the organizing metaphor of evolution will modulate the unraveling of our case-study: the ecologies of mobile internet and teenage participation in an urban slum habitat. As next generation users, millions of teenagers in constrained environments like the Indian slum are beginning to evolve unique definitions of internet technology. Researching this dynamic space is capturing emerging future markets and the aligned prerogative of servicing them. Our ethnography captures unique affordances and limits of young power users having vaulted across traditional communication barriers to embrace the mobile internet; these have indeed revolutionized communication ecologies in technology constrained environments. As similar ecologies access the internet through mobile phones it becomes imperative to study users, usability and utility for industry design and services The subsequent sections in this paper will consist of a literature review of relevant debates and frameworks to analyze primary data, findings to elaborate the on demand and street corner internet, and discussion with regard to usage patterns in three areas: mobile Internet as entertainment media, socio-technical system and producing a certain kind of user. The article concludes with a summary of comments on media practices in developing a user model, which is based on an investigation of how internet technologies are used for interaction, creativity and 'innovation' at the margins of mainstream society.

## FOREGROUNDING DEBATES

To discuss user behaviours of the mobile internet among teenagers in a slum in Hyderabad, we do not employ a specific framework but broadly use the social shaping of technology as guiding data analysis. As analytical lens it focuses on how people engage with technology and the variety of social behaviors that emerge as a result of it. We also do this through what previous research has revealed as the mobile phone permeated 'everyday life' through a bunch of cultural processes [Harvey May and Greg Hearn 2005, Dobrowolski et al 2000]. Everyday life is viewed as a range of social practices that recur as elements of daily routine and qualifies the mobile phone to be 'personal, portable and pedestrian' [Ito et al 2005]. Donner explains that for many researchers, mobiles are best understood as

co-constructed phenomena of the interrelationships between what the technology is and how people choose to use it (Donner 2008). The simple distinction between offline and online no longer captures the complex practices associated with online technologies as they become thoroughly embedded in the routines of everyday life (Bakardjieva, 2005; Silverstone, 2006). To understand the relation between the two, the notion of mediation – social and technological – permits us to avoid a technologically deterministic account while acknowledging the shaping role of both technology and social practices (Bakardjieva, 2005). In this way, technologies can be understood as artifacts which may be both shaped by and shaping of the practices humans use in interaction 'with, around and through them' (Hutchby 2001)

It is usually acknowledged that a gap exists between technology design and technology use. Users adapt and customize technology to suit needs (Heeks 2002). Technology can be studied as pertaining to a socio-geographic context [an urban slum] or a cultural milieu [non-elite or under-privileged teenagers] and their underlying rules, resources, and capacities that might enable or restrict use. How grounded is the mobile internet in such a milieu? We see energetic uptake with an affordable internet for diverse ends like entertainment, friendship, romance even in resource crunched ecologies. The communicative and multimedia capabilities of the Internet and mobile phone technologies have seen more vigorous uptake than that of informative functions. It seems the 'object character' (Hahn 2008) goes far beyond the functions of the mobile phone. It relates to mobile phones as a consumer good, and to particular forms of 'cultural appropriation' transforming the material object and its functions. More importantly it is the juxta-positioning of stringency of spending and affluence of use as users redistribute and allocate money to purchase the internet. The rich experience of technology is a combination of several local factors revolving around the need to create, what we might call 'spaces of innovation', rather than any inherent properties these technologies may possess [Tacchi 2004]. For teenagers, the online realm may be enthusiastically adopted because it represents 'their' space, visible to the peer group more than to adult surveillance, an exciting yet relatively safe opportunity to conduct the social psychological task of adolescence – to construct, experiment with, and present a reflexive project of the self in a social context (Buchner et al 1995, Giddens 1991). A rapidly expanding body of empirical research is examining how people create personal profiles, network with familiar and new contacts and participate in various forms of online community (Boyd 2006, Boyd and Ellison 2007). Berg, Harper & Taylor (2004) talk about the 'walls of teenage experience' being altered thought technology use and ask what might be the metrics used to discern behaviors around internet and aspirational internet. On-line experiences are a novel means of experiencing, producing, and consuming leisure. Users are harnessing online social technologies from the profound to the trivial, from 'fictionalizing fact to factualizing fiction' (Arora 2010). In the context of the developed world and in the stable comforts of middle class life youth want to be in 'perpetual' contact via texting, instant messaging, mobile phones, and Internet connections. This continuous presence requires ongoing maintenance and negotiation (Boyd et al 2006). How much of this is true in a far less privileged context of Hafeezpet?

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## METHOD

Hafeezpet boasts of a proximity to the vast public infrastructures in the IT hub of Hyderabad, a burgeoning global IT city of India. The slum stands on unauthorized land currently in the process of being regularized by the government and consists of three neighborhoods, two on either side of a highway that emerges from the Hi-tech Park and arrives at the Hafeezpet railway station. The study was conducted in two phases. Initial investigations in the month of November and December 2010 consisted of observations and semi-structured interviews with civic and political leaders in Hafeezpet, as well as with shop owners who traded in mobile phones, ran a video gaming parlor or a cyber cafe. Our aim was to speak with key informants who occupied important local administrative positions, represented a sample of ICT-enabled businesses who would map out the demand and consumption for ICTS like mobile phones, the internet and on/off line gaming. Public spaces like shop fronts, households, traffic intersections, and crossroads, as well as communal spaces like street corners, weekly street bazaars, were observed to record the "everyday" life of Hafeezpet. The second phase took place January to April 2011 and ongoing since July This field work involved more in-depth and semi-structured interviews with 22 randomly selected teenagers living in Hafeezpet between the ages 15-19, all are male except for one . Out of the 22, 10 were in high school and 2 in a college pursuing studies and 8 out of the 12 were doing part-time jobs. The remaining 10 had discontinued studies and were employed full-time or part time. A series of open-ended individual interviews were conducted mostly in 'hang outs' like street corners or shop fronts almost never in their homes, schools or work places. Only 4 of them had home access to the internet and 6 of them had their own personal profile on Orkut or Facebook, which they rarely visited. We interacted and profiled each subject over several weeks and multiple interviews (an average of 30–90 minutes per interview).

Tacchi, Slater, Hearn (2005) developed an approach to focus on the actual use of, and interaction with, technologies in the wider context of people's lives and social and cultural structures – what they term as 'communicative ecologies' (Slater and Tacchi 2003). This approach aids two processes: broad understanding of the wider culture, socio-technical structures and communicative ecologies of the research field and more targeted research aimed at understanding one particular issue or set of issues in the community. The focus is less on the technologies themselves than on their innovative and creative uses, in various combinations and in specific locational contexts. Our initial focus was to observe the processes by which teenagers acquired mobile phones and activated and used internet on them. From a broad understanding of these behaviours we narrowed our focus on how the internet was purchased and expensed for persistent and sustained usages. A number of teenagers offered coherent pictures of how they fit the internet into their lives, and what they gained as a result of these practices. Many described straightforward sets of functions that the internet allowed them to carry out, not just as a technical tool but as a social tool: talking to friends, interacting with other people, communicating/chatting with friends/family; listening to music; playing games; watching movies and video clips; and having *fun* sharing unique experiences fashioned by this new entity called internet.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. We broadly coded and organized data manually into matrices shedding light on the specific aspects of the mobile internet access and use. More importantly, we explored how these unfolded in a context bearing financial, technical and infrastructural constraints. Given our overall concern with how teenagers accessed and managed

internet experiences with little money or recourse we focused on and addressed a) dominant usages of the internet, (b) the ways expense are managed to endure with the internet, c) motivations and literacies shaping the internet experience, and d) how are these sustained. Our aim is to bring out the cultural practices teenagers create and engage in their everyday environment to pursue technology practices.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main contribution of this paper is to put to use primary data from the field in formulating a vision of the user in the quest to use a technology artifact: in this case the mobile internet. The increasing availability and affordability of network access in urban India paves way for much of the findings in this paper. We present this section analyzing how the internet is employed in the daily life rhythms of teenagers and could this lead to an ideal type or a user model of a young person's engagement with it. During our fieldwork, we observed several factors shaping subject's perceptions of what constitutes the internet as it relates to a wish-fulfillment of desires to entertain and pass leisure time. We highlight two strategies teenagers adopt to persist with the internet by elaborating on our initial notion of the 'on demand' internet and the 'street corner internet'. These are, simply put, the result of user innovations to manage needs within means. We provides key findings from ethnographic research and a discussion supporting initial research questions around the forging of internet via staggering costs, scheduling time and sharing know how for optimal use. Our key findings are centered on the following: 1) Investigate everyday scheduling of internet time and Identify ways costs are optimized for sustained use, [contributing to the on-demand internet] 2) Qualify the sociality around operationalizing internet use and skills [contributing to the street corner internet]. These young Internet users are non-elite, marginally employed and with a limited education they have struggled to obtain and leverage in the down-market environment of an urban slum. Entertainment usages constitute a significant portion of everyday mobile internet use, transforming the technology experience of users that have had no previous experience with the internet. At the time of our research, fourteen out of twenty two profiled teenagers were using the internet on their mobile phones and the remaining eight occasionally accessed the internet on a borrowed phone. For fifteen of them, their first experience of the internet was on a mobile phone. Seven teens had used the internet on a computer in their schools, at cyber café or at a friend's home. None had a technical understanding of the internet but knew some of the things it could enable them to do. For most, the internet was a pathway to games, music and video, driving behaviors to browse search and identify content on the web. For most of the youth of Hafeezpet, the internet used to be something that only existed in a cyber café. Then two years ago, telecom provider Aircel introduced the 'pocket internet' for mobile phones for a charge of Rs 5 for [one ¢] 3 days of unlimited use. Three of our teenaged subjects were early clients of this Aircel plan.

While stressing the positioning of the internet amidst the 'goings on' in everyday life we also take care to specify the conditions of an urban slum mediating the fit of the internet in this every day. Entertainment usages, games, audio-visual content viewing, download constitute a significant portion of everyday internet use, transforming the technology experience of users having no previous experience with the internet

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### The 'On-demand' internet

There is little possibility for an always on /perpetual internet to function optimally in an urban slum in India. For one most residents are bottom of the pyramid consumers, with little to spare on personal technologies: two, the slum being an informal and ill-legal settlement there is precious little infrastructure that can uphold a 24/7 broad band internet connectivity. Amidst this scarcity there exists the affluence of internet use! Teenagers use, play, tease, share, and teach the internet. To do this they need to expense the internet in ways that can afford and sustain its persistent use. How does this happen?

The mobile phone and the accompanying internet plan were expensed with money teenagers earned doing odd jobs or saving pocket money. Kulbeer (age 16) a high school student and active user of mobile phone internet began using mobiles 4-5 years ago. He worked this summer assisting a pharmacist and spent an entire month's salary, around Rs 4000 [89$] for a second-hand nokia N-83 to support advanced gaming. Two years ago he used an internet prepaid coupon the first time for Rs16 [3¢] with a validity for 3 days. He said:

> "These 3 days are completely dedicated to downloading my favorite music and videos from free websites. I have a kitty of favorite websites and I know where to fetch my latest A/Vs. I recharge 6 times a month with the same card rather than go for a high denomination. This way I will get internet when I want to and when I have time to do the stuff I need to…"

For Kulbeer internet needs to be carefully scheduled such that the allocated time, effort and money optimally suits his means. Dattu (age 16), currently in high school and the poorest in our pool of subjects [his father is a 'coolie' in the Hafeezpet railway station] earned his phone, a second-hand Nokia n-gage (a gaming phone), doing odd painting jobs. He generally recharges with Rs 14 [less than 3¢] two to three times a month. He said:

> "I need to be prudent. I try to activate my card when I am alone and free from school and work to browse as much as I want…"

Subjects spent, typically in a month, an average of Rs 100 [little over 2 $] for activation and use of the internet. Almost all of them buy re-charge coupons ranging between Rs 5 [one ¢ to and Rs 99 [little over 2$] purely depending on how much they can afford to spend at the time of purchase. Many deliberate on the size of downloads available for specific re-charge coupon to stagger usages and expenses. Mahesh (age 18) is in high school and works part time delivering milk in the mornings. He said:

> "I have two SIM cards in my phone one dedicated for internet browsing and download… and the other for talk time. I don't have much money for internet but I will activate with small coupons it when I hang out with friends and download content on weekends."

Khaiser (age 18) discontinued 9th grade and is a fruit and vegetable vendor. He spends Rs 200 [4$]] gaming in a parlor and Rs 200 on talk time/internet coupons from his income of 3000 [67$] per

month. Karthik (age 19) is full time assistant in his father's tiny all-purpose store. He loves the internet and said:

> "I even got a Vodafone service for live chat facility to make new friends… it was way too expensive around Rs 2 [half a cent] per minute… Now I use G chat or Yahoo chat on my Mobile internet which is a cheaper option…".

Sunny (age 18), a full time fresher in college has a more or less routinized his on-demand internet. , He began using a recharge coupon worth Rs 5 and moved to Rs 14 [4¢] recharge coupon with 3 days validity and a download cap of 2 GB. At the time of the interview he was using a Rs 27 [50¢] coupon with a weeks' validity period and said:

> "After experimenting with these, I sort of balance out my internet use and expense. Right now I am happy with Rs14 recharge 3-4 times in a month and a Rs 27 once in a month. I browse during breaks in my college and join my friends who will be browsing mobile internet during this time. While returning home I drop by my best friend Kishan's house and get hooked for another couple of hours exchanging experiences…"

Wasim, 17, a high school dropout and employed as a contract electrician in a Honda Show room, deliberates on his mobile internet behaviors:

> "I have a total of 4 SIM cards. I use Aircel for internet purpose and a Vodafone SIM which is unknown to anyone and make blank calls to tease my friends…I use TATA DoCoMo for making regular calls as it has many offers like double talk time and specially low fares for ISD calls and I use this to talk with my brother in Dubai. Finally the fourth one, is an Airtel SIM which I have been using since the beginning and I keep this at home in a mobile. And if I get any calls on this number my family members inform me. And also I always choose fancy numbers before I take any SIM…"

The on-demand internet is carefully managed, expensed and enjoyed piecemeal but affording independence to experience the internet at will and pleasure. These are the closest approximations of an always-on internet forged with care by teenagers of Hafeezpet

### The Street corner internet

The street corner internet can be understood as a cultural site, leading to internet literacy and skill share. Such a site is qualified by context specific characteristics, one qualified by acute resource constraints and consequent forging of the internet experience among its members. What are the components of this lived world of the street internet society? How do participants construct and make their social interactions meaningful? How do they assemble their knowledge, and infuse the social networks of the society? Here the 'internet' is understood and negotiated as artifact, as skill, as social platform among a network of likeminded aficionados. Skills are formed, transferred and consequently evolve and congeal around the mobile internet. The shared 'moments' underpin the forging of internet experiences among a population that can ill-afford an unregulated and affluent use of it. In Hafeezpet, technology infrastructure is not a given stable entity but a messy assemblage of individual and

community initiatives. It is this unique mix of the social and the technological providing a rich and productive terrain for thinking about the sociality of human-technology relations, in this case, in a context of resource constraint. What might we learn from considering these as a new social organism for transferring ICT skills and use? Perhaps the Slum technology cultures can suggest some new approaches towards its users creatively forging scarcity with persistent use. With such a site, we hope to establish the relationship between the forms of interactions resulting in the embedding of the internet in lives of these teenagers. Burrell's (2009) notion of a networked site, incorporating the "*physical, virtual, and imagined*", finds expression in the street corners of Hafeezpet.

We identified two street corner internet societies, one at a pharmacist by a street corner and one a mobile repair shop on a the highway scaffolding Hafeezpet and present a few of their characteristics. The street corner internet society is divided into experts and novices. From our pool of subjects Karthik (age18, a school dropout managing a family run mobile store and content download business) Omar (age 19, a school dropout managing a mobile repair shop), Kulbeer (age 16 and the heaviest user of the internet in our sample) and Sunny (age 18 a college freshmen) are the acknowledged experts. All of them are expert browsers and can teach a 'thing or two' about 'where to look for a treasure chest of free audio and video downloads'. They are also self-proclaimed experts in applications like MS word, MS paint and FrontPage. Kulbeer and Sunny the two college-going subjects in out sample had, in their words, 'developed sophisticated usages of the phone'. They claim they are the only ones in Hafeezpet who are on Facebook and can "Google anything or anybody." Sunny is excited about a new browser he just discovered freely available for mobile phones and is actively evangelizing it to his associates. Young people dropped in and out of the society but not before they are drawn to and engage with the mobile internet. It is here that Wasim learnt to do the internet: search and download audio-visual content games and compatible browsers, media players and anti-virus programs. He admits:

> "I am little poor in understanding the technicalities of mobile internet because of my lack of formal education. I depend on my friends and sometimes simply let them lead me …"

Omar's mobile shop, F.C. Mobiles, on the main road of Hafeezpet is our second street internet society. The road houses many microenterprises and young working persons who dropped in and out of the hub. Omar runs his family's mobile store, offering re-charge coupons and mobile accessories. In addition, being the self-appointed tech-guru, Omar had also begun repairing mobile phone hardware. An internet 'junkie', Omar is constantly discovering 'stuff on the net' for downloads and amassed a wealth of content. He is an expert at estimating the size and duration of audio/video downloads with an encyclopedic awareness of the current internet plans constantly under revision by service providers and identifying the right plan to manage a desired internet use. He is the resident consultant for customizing the needs of his friends to an appropriate internet package. Much of his status as tech-guru came from the nuanced advice about fetching, managing and consuming content. In fact Omar's hub was a trouble-shooting paradise for self-proclaimed internet addicts and generic mobile phone users who gathered around him not only to disentangle everyday usability issues but to learn specific skills. Wasim got his internet activated, look a crash course on "what buttons to press for what functions," downloaded "the correct AV player from the correct web site", removed viruses, re-formatted the phone and achieved a certain level of proficiency. This ebb and flow of experimentation

and dissemination of skill, know-how and content happen between Hafeezpet experts and novices and correspondingly between high-end and low-end phones in the club.

### Meet the user from Hafeezpet

The Hafeezpet user is embedded in the ever day of an urban slum, near an IT park and in a global city in India. This user is usually male, is multilingual [at least two Indian languages with varying proficiencies in English], is literate with reasonable texting skills and is 'mobile' in life. The last is possibly what defines our user: a teenager, a student moonlighting with a part-time job, always on the move, mostly hanging out in public space and with little or no privacy or private space; despite small spending power extremely desirous of always-on and perpetual internet acess. Again, despite acute shortage of resource and infrastructure, forges a range of skills, literacies and resources from key contacts in the neighborhood. The highly proficient user transfers these to the less proficient user and more often, even the devices change hands for learning experiences. The user is an agile energetic investigator of free content staggering internet time to fetch the most from the least of expense. Devices are subject to intermittent collective control for this transfer of knowhow amidst personal ownership and use.

The Hafeezpet user wants the best of technology and willing to experiment. Sanjay (age 19) borrows a friends phone to use the internet and is waiting to get a new one that will aid speedy browsing. Mahesh (age 17) said:

> "I want big screen mobile with long length. I want dual SIM mobile, memory card with 4 GB capacity and Bluetooth facility…I have undercover girlfriends and trying to manage privacy with a IM chat! I have around 200 SMSs stored in my phone that helps chat… I have a talk time deal with a 1000 free SMS. I recharge for love!!!"

Khaiser (age 16), uses internet on a friend's mobile by inserting his SIM along with a recharge coupon. He said:,

> "I want to have a mobile with 2.0 pixel camera, MP3 player with super sound clarity, a HD video player with a long battery life…. And I found all these in Carbon 666 model, a strong phone with a strong body that can take falls… I want to take an iPhone even second hand but I'm worried that its screen is so brittle…"

Irfan, (18) a full time assistant to a Pharmacist in Hafeezpet and is poor and spends very little on phone services but 'gets what he wants'. He said:

> "I do very little internet on my own and my phone is also basic with no Bluetooth. I have a small memory card that fits in my friend Kulbeer's mobile. So I keep my memory card in Kulbeer's mobile and borrow my boss Naseer Bhai's mobile. Both have Bluetooth and I copy songs from one mobile to the other till all the songs that I desire get transferred into my memory card".

Wasim (age 17) wants 3G just for the video calling facility. He said:

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> "3G means we can talk with people face to face on mobile itself. My brothers live in Dubai I can enjoy talking with them while seeing them on mobile…" Even using the mobile internet in a marginal location can turn the user global!

We could see the Hafeezpet user as part of dialectic of dual qualities: 1. Semi-literate but multi-lingual 2. Local yet global 3. Constrained spending power and affluent aspirations 4. Poverty of technology infrastructure and plenty of human skill resource 5. Stringent spending capacity yet rich user 6. Public use but private control of mobile internet. In the end the slum ecology promotes rich usages albeit walking a tightrope between affordability and aspirations, public and private usages, stringent costs and rising desires.

## CONCLUSION: PERSISTING WITH THE INTERNET

The implications of this study go beyond this particular market segment in India to encompass low-income groups with varying degree of marginality in the mainstream society, in the global South and possibly even in downtown slums in industrialized nations. We are now globally witnessing effective strategies to meet the telecommunication needs of low-income populations, some of these driven by large institutions such as network providers, development agencies and outcome of the activities of entrepreneurial individuals (Rangaswamy 2010). Most strategies are specific configurations of sharing, managing and controlling costs to match use. A thriving local production industry for mobile ownership, use, exchange, repair and content provision is available in India due to the availability of resources and the easy forging of infrastructure and tech skill. Urban slums in India are home to hundreds of millions of bottom-of-the-pyramid consumers of ICTs. Given India's continuous economic boom a new set of market dynamics emerged along with the tremendous communication demands of this migrant class in search of employment, education opportunities, social support and networking resources. It is within this structure of market differentiation and the growing consumption power of the BOP consumer, services like the Aircel pocket internet gain tremendous uptake. We choose teenagers in a resource challenged environment to understand an emerging field of inquiry, that of how the youth learn to play with and participate in a new form of internet in complex and ambitious ways. In Hafeezpet mobile phones are personalized through a public and organic sharing of knowledge to operate its softwares and applications, what we may call 'spontaneous and opportunistic human behaviours and practice' to customize the mobile phone (Bygdas et al 2003: 3). In a predominantly public [limited privacy] scenario and face to face interaction and communication, resides a form of individuated and pocket sized internet. Handling the phone as a material object through particular patterns of usage is explained and discussed against the background of the social dynamic of an urban slum. The media landscapes created by teenagers serve to articulate their personal space while defining their relationships to others. Internet use here is not about virtual social networking, presentation of selves or donning of digital identities. Instead, it is about a specific kind of domestication of the phone to acquire multimedia content. Thus the mobile internet is frequently viewed by its users as a platform of considerable resource for multimedia entertainment. So far, we presented descriptions and analysis of a distinct appropriation driven by certain dominant imaginations of the internet and the mobile platform. The way users engaged and experienced it was firstly as a resourceful platform for entertainment content bearing potential to allow them to freely browse, search and download content that was earlier brought at a store for a price. These user-driven behaviours

come into play, possibly for the first time through mobile phones and for the price of talk time plan of one's choice. These practices make the best use of constrained consumer power by leveraging what [the users think] as available and open to economic convenience. Our research points to some distinct patterns of use that are not only outcomes of technological possibilities, affordances and specifications but also emerge from the cultural milieu of youth in an urban slum in a rapidly developing economy emerging as a major consumer of information and communication technologies.

This possibility of the internet transforming into a content platform for opportunistic and non-elite teenagers is also an unfolding of a particular form and context of technology access and affordability. Included in this effort was a relative sense of freedom to use the internet as dictated by desires, motivation, and skills to 'work around' limited means and resources. Are we seeing something uniquely related to the culture of an aspiring bottom of the pyramid consumer class in India or is this prelude to deeper and sophisticated behaviors? In this paper we considered the paths to the meanings than the meanings themselves that young people attribute to mobile communication in their everyday lives. Users may modify the device, download or program new applications; they might invent new unintended uses for the technology, or invent new practices that leverage its possibilities. This experimentation process is the core of a distinct mode of appropriation in the urban slums of India: a bunch of usages that together produce a system and a user specific to the slum. Social factors like a specific socio-geographic community act to structure both the economic and cultural resources available to the user and to particular modes of cultural consumption. Teenagers of Hafeezpet negotiated the physical and social geography of their social habitats to develop patterns of use.

A technology is new because of new uses. Access, affordability and market pricing are revolutionizing impacts of wireless technologies. We have seen a new availability and affordance of the internet impacting shifts in user behaviours, communicative experiences and reconfigurations of neighborhood sociality. Youth cultures are thought of as a system of values and beliefs informing behaviours in a specific age group as different from others (Castells 2009). In Hafeezpet the young are establishing relationships with technology that is both expressive and instrumental: instrumental in fetching desired content and expressive of shared youth behaviours. If they are under privileged teenagers persisting in a global IT-driven developing economy they also persist in the midst of the rush and wave of new digital technologies. These are youth not just in a universal condition of humanity but in specific times.

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