

The use of mobile phones in the rural villages of South Africa

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Research Area: Republic of South Africa

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Keywords: Mobile phones, Internet, Wireless networks, Migrant workers, SNS (Social Networking Services)

From the beginning of the 21st century, the uses of mobile phones have rapidly expanded in Africa as well as other parts of the world. South Africa is the most advanced nation of mobile phone use in Sub-Saharan Africa. Nowadays, mobile phone occupies the important part of the people's social lives in everywhere in the country.

Wild Coast, where I conduct the field research, is located in a rural part of the Province of Eastern Cape, south-east coast of the country. In that area, there are few opportunities of employments. Many people move to urban areas, such as Johannesburg or Cape Town, as migrant workers. Families or friends in the rural area are connected to these migrants with mobile phones and SMSs (Short Messaging Services).

Because of the hard competition among the device makers or network providers, both mobile phone devices and network fee are getting cheaper. Thus the people in the rural area can easily use Internet via mobile phones, as well as voice call or SMSs. Many people use Facebook, and even those who do not have an opportunity to use computers know the word 'Googling'(use of Google). Mxit, the social network service originated in South Africa, is very popular communication medium, especially among high school



Photo 1: A young man is using the mobile



Photo 2: A "public mobile phone" shop at the market

students. During the research, I saw a boy using Mxit for three hours every day!

In Japan, the increase of mobile phone uses results the decrease of public phones. Contrary in South Africa, public phones using mobile phone networks are still one of the main communication media. Personal entrepreneurs run “public mobile phone” shops at the market.

Although not very rapidly, the uses of personal computers in the villages are getting larger.

However, even if these new media are spreading among the people’s lives, old media such as radio or television remain a part of people’s lives, and seem not to disappear.

Thus, in rural villages in South Africa, the ways of communication and information acquiring are getting diverse. This study aims to reveal the unique social situation of these media in this area much further.



Photo 3: A mobile phone shop at the centre of village