Selling people and places: the political economy of mobile social media

Smartphones

Phones? No, computers

Continual connectivity

GPS

Social networking untethered from the desktop

Places and digital networks

Foursquare, New York City

Location-based networking

Data on where I go, when I go there, how often I go there, what I do, who I do it with...

Commoditisation of user and place

Social capital vs experience of place

Targeted advertising

The political economy of social media - the database of use, location and activity

Somalia

No Functioning Government since 1993

No telecommunications regulation

Cheapest phone tariffs and best coverage in Africa
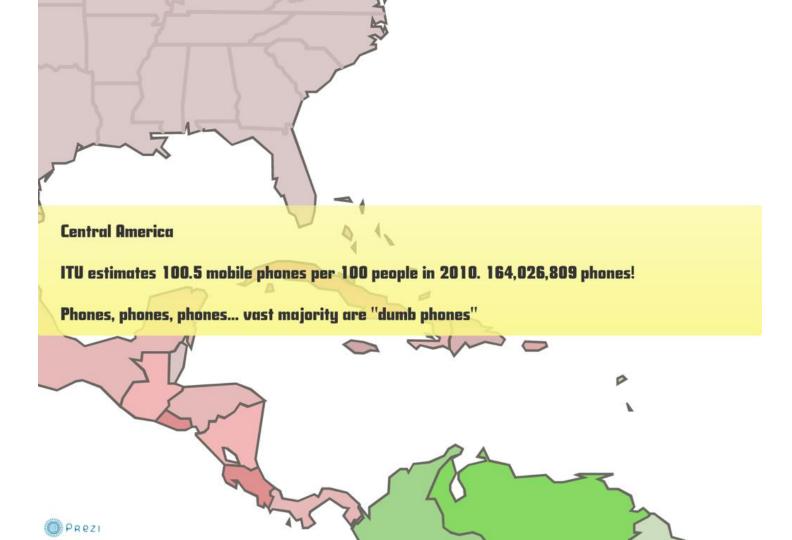
Indonesia

Mobile Phone penetration over 90%

Airtime discounts with Danone Yoghurt = doubling of sales

Vietnam

Mobile phone penetration - over 100%

Central America

ITU estimates 100.5 mobile phones per 100 people in 2010. 164,026,809 phones!

Phones, phones, phones... vast majority are "dumb phones"

Usage of phones in developing economies

Banking - opens up accounts, money transfers and basic financial facilities

Talking! - we often forget the use and design of the phone

Social networking - Facebook growth in Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico. 200 character b/w screen

Advertising - 74% of users in Brazil are fine with adverts as long as they get mobile credit for products

Dumb phones

The technology of the 90's and 2000's

Helping developing markets leapfrog wire line technology and go straight to the 90's

Also avoiding the broadcast advertising of the 20th Century... targeted and direct

Just as emerging markets become most important

Facebook strategy - SIM cards, free apps, friends on 200 b/w character screen. USER LOCK IN

Mobile Digital Political Economy

We know the labour value - the usage of the device to produce data

We know where the surplus value is - data is sold as a commodity to advertisers that can target users based on their preferences

This is Dallas Smythe's audience commodity - no free lunch on the Internet, as Christian Fuchs might say

We should also acknowledge that phone based commoditisation involves a material and immaterial aspect

Does materiality contribute to a dual articulation of commoditisation - people (data producer) and place (data site)?