

The Impact of Mobile Phones on Indigenous Social Structures: A Cross-cultural Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT Mobile phones are part of a major growth industry in so-called Third World countries. As in other places, the use of this technology changes communication behaviour. The influence of these changes on indigenous social structures was investigated with a mixed-type questionnaire that targeted parameters such as: in-group vs. out-group communication, involvement with dominant industrial culture and the use of financial resources. Data was collected from indigenous representatives at the United Nations, as well as in Africa from subjects of various cultural backgrounds, and from a control group in Berlin. The results reflect widespread use of mobile phones among indigenous persons, having a segregating effect within the indigenous community, but also enhancing in-group communication and especially the use of the indigenous language. Mobile phones also facilitate moves from village to town, with the opportunity of frequently communicating with other in-group members.