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DIY Phone Plan: Individuation, Flexible Accumulation and Mobile Phone Use in the Philippines

By the end of 2008, mobile phone use in the Philippines had soared to 57.9 million users in a country of 96 million people. That 70% of the population own mobile phones is significant when considering that 36.8% live below the poverty line. In the last five years there has been a surge in promotional products created by Philippine mobile phone companies enabling users to be co-producers of their own mobile phone plans. By subscribing to services such as Globe Telecom's Unlitxt and Immortaltxt and Smart Communications' SmartTalk, prepaid (pay-as-you-go) and postpaid (monthly plan) users are able to further customize and personalize their mobile phone use to their individual needs, financial capabilities, and for the length of time that they wish. This paper examines the motivation behind the creation of these products, the ways in which they contribute to individuation and flexible accumulation, and how they create sites of empowerment or resistance. It highlights the importance of understanding local forms of mobile phone use, the role of technology on everyday life, and its implications on Philippine modernity.