The WhatsApp Economy

Rohini Lakshané
Internet Researchers' Conference
February 2016
rohini@cis-india.org
CC-BY-SA 4.0

#FutureBazaars

Collaborative workflow in organisations, big and small

- WhatsApp/ Telegram/ other instant messaging (IM) apps
- Google Suite
- Slack
- Scrollback
- Kanban
- Goodbox

"Customer support over email and phone is so 20th century. Now it's all @WhatsApp! [redacted]"

— **Vijay Vadlamani (@VJV87), Product Manager at Now Floats, December 3, 2014**

- Inexpensive mobile phones; some of them are *shan zhai*
- Inexpensive data plans, priced as low as INR 20 (~USD 0.30), *(The world in a 20-rupee netpack: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WJAGStkvPA)*
- Mobile-first use
- Growing mobile device use

1. Birkodi, Kumta, Karnataka

A tiny fishing village by the Arabian Sea in north Karnataka.

About 15 dwellings, a mosque, a primary school, and a run-down provisions shop.

-- as of November 2014

Latifa Bi (fisherwoman), *"We catch fish and sell it in the town. We don't make more than five thousand rupees a month..."*

One of her sons discusses fish prices on WhatsApp with other fishermen, *"The middlemen cannot fleece us now."*

He only uses WhatsApp, Facebook and Nokia Maps. (Nimbuzz before the emergence of WhatsApp.)

2. Sangli, Maharashtra

Chanda, sex worker *(Photo by Rohini Lakshané, CC-BY-SA 3.0)*

Chanda lives in Gokul Nagar, one of its red-light areas of Sangli.

- Crank callers are an occupational hazard
- Hooked on: Sex work and Mobile Phones
  http://eroticsindia.org/gender-and-tech/hooked-on-sex-work-and-mobile-phones/

3. Bengaluru

"Silicon Valley of India"

- Facebook group "Second to None"; Website: http://second-to-none.in; Android App: https://goo.gl/V5hpKi

  Differentiated from classified websites such as OLX and Quickr.

- Apps of e-commerce websites + Advertising by way of campaigns (E.g.:Big Billion Day Sale by Flipkart); The urban poor now access e-commerce.

4. New Delhi

A boutique owner orders materials from suppliers via WhatsApp.

Turnaround time reduces as the paperwork for requisition comes later.

4. New Delhi

A boutique owner orders materials from suppliers via WhatsApp.

Turnaround time reduces as the paperwork for requisition comes later.

5. Jamshedpur, Jharkhand

"India's Steel City"

At the start of the business day for steel traders, the rates for purchase and sale for the day are decided on a WhatsApp group.

(Confidential research)

The WhatsApp Economy engulfs

The urban rich

The urban poor

The rural rich

The rural poor

Implications for

Access

Digital Security

Privacy

Net Neutrality

Intellectual Property

Regulation (Net Neutrality, Consumer Protection, and so on)