

## **A typology of mobile uses among small and informal businesses**

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### **Abstract/Summary**

Small and informal businesses in the developing world are rapidly adopting mobile telephony; many have access to mediated communication technologies for the first time. There is a great deal of enthusiasm in the popular press and in the development literature about how this adoption can/will lead to increased productivity or revenue for these small businesses. In addition, in the past few years, a number of academic studies have begun to explore the uses of mobile telephony among small and informal businesses.

This paper is a step back, primarily a meta-analysis, of the studies released to date. It proposes that reliance on the basic terms “mobile phone use” and “small and informal business” hides the actual processes by which individual enterprises take advantage of particular functions of mobile telephony.

The paper’s core synthesis is a matrix, proposing a set of enterprise types (trade, manufacturing/production, fixed retail and services, roaming retail and services, and transport) crossed by common business processes. Studies from the academic and development literature populate the cells in the matrix. The pattern of current evidence suggests that within the small and informal business (MSE) sector, benefits of mobile use accrue mostly (but not exclusively) to existing enterprises, in ways which amplify and accelerate material and informational flows, rather than fundamentally transforming them. Further, it seems that most of the benefits associated with mobile use by this population center on communication at a distance (shared with landlines) rather than individual addressability or ‘perpetual contact’ (unique to mobile and wireless devices).

The paper suggests future quantitative work to assess the relative size of the cells and the robustness of the model.