

Cellphone and Landline Telephone Use in Rural Mexico: Emerging Practices from a Migrant Sending Village



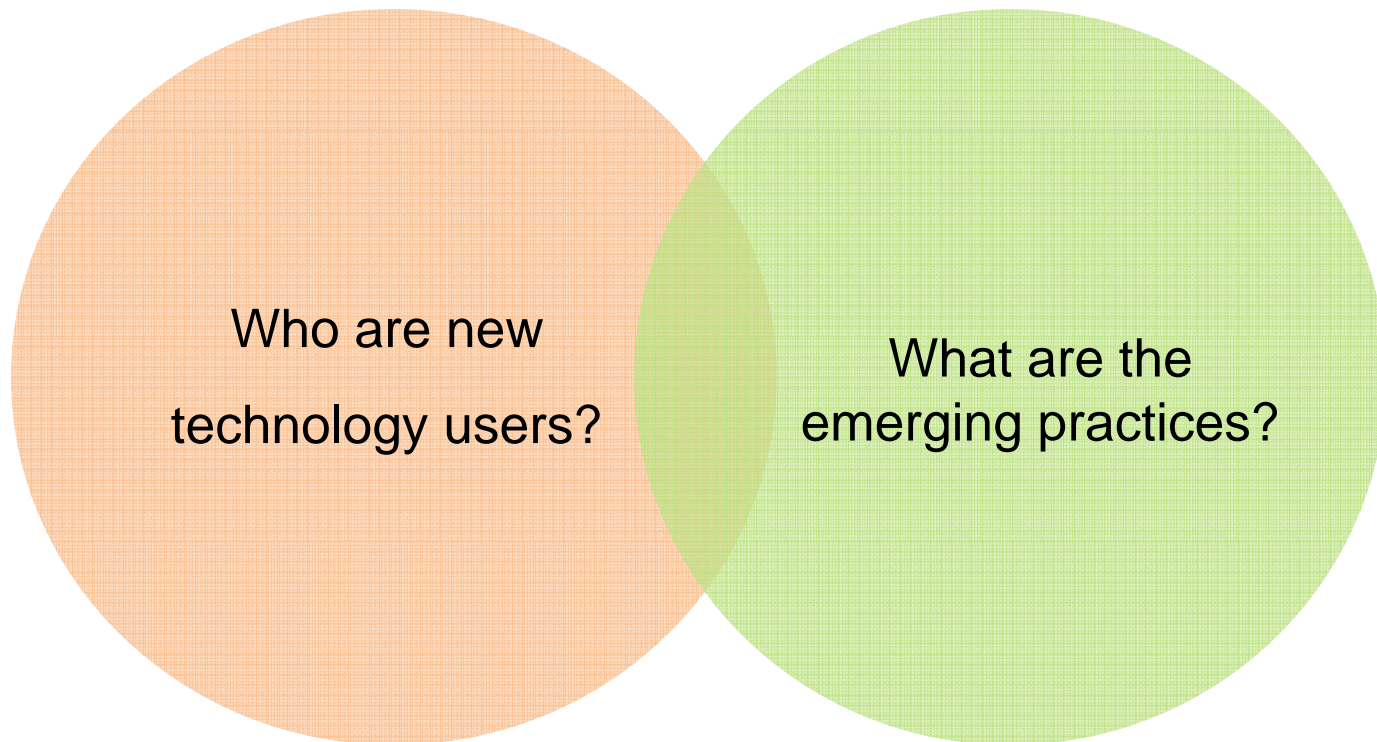
preliminary findings from research still in progress

Research conducted with support from UCSD's Center of Comparative Immigrant Studies, UCMEXUS - Institute for Mexico and the United States, and UC Labor Employment Research Fund (LERF)

PRESENTATION FOR TIER (Technology and Infrastructure for Emerging Regions)
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tricia wang | UC San Diego

RESEARCH QUESTIONS



LITERATURE

1.) Migration and Globalization

Migration and globalization literature implicit assumes that communication technology, such as cellphones, increases social ties.

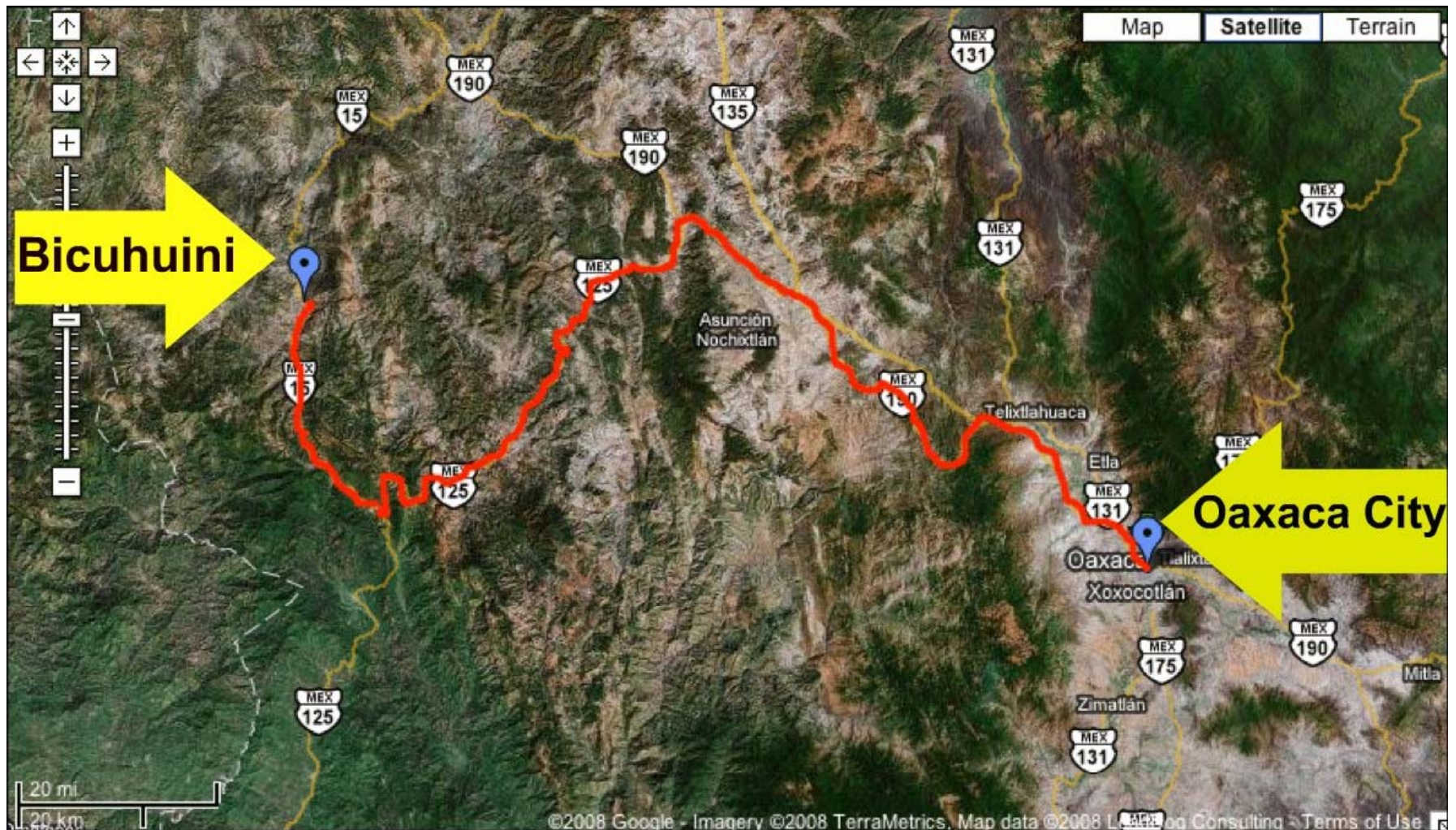
2.) First adopters

Studies of the first adopters of cellphones show that the majority of new users are mobile professionals.

RESEARCH SITE – Bicuhuini, Oaxaca



Geography of Bichuhini, Oaxaca



Bicuhuini, population 500-900



Economy

- Subsistence
- Light agriculture



Location

- Local highway built 40 years
- Mountainous terrain, rocky
- 3 hours from a large town



Housing

- Houses are built out of metal, concrete or wood
- Some houses no electircity
- No running water in homes



Education

- Low literacy rates
- Low levels of education

Migrant Sending Community



Remittances

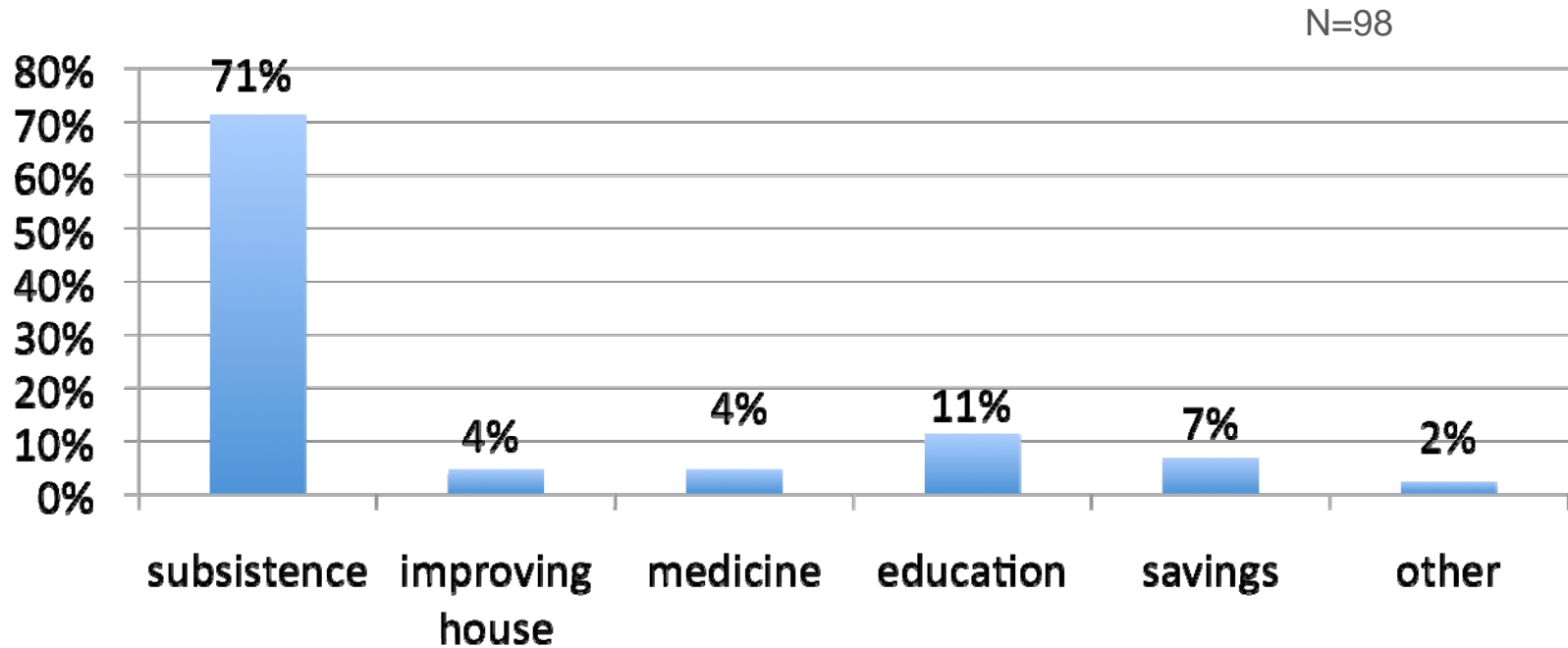
- At least half of the individuals rely on this as a source of income



Gender Relationships

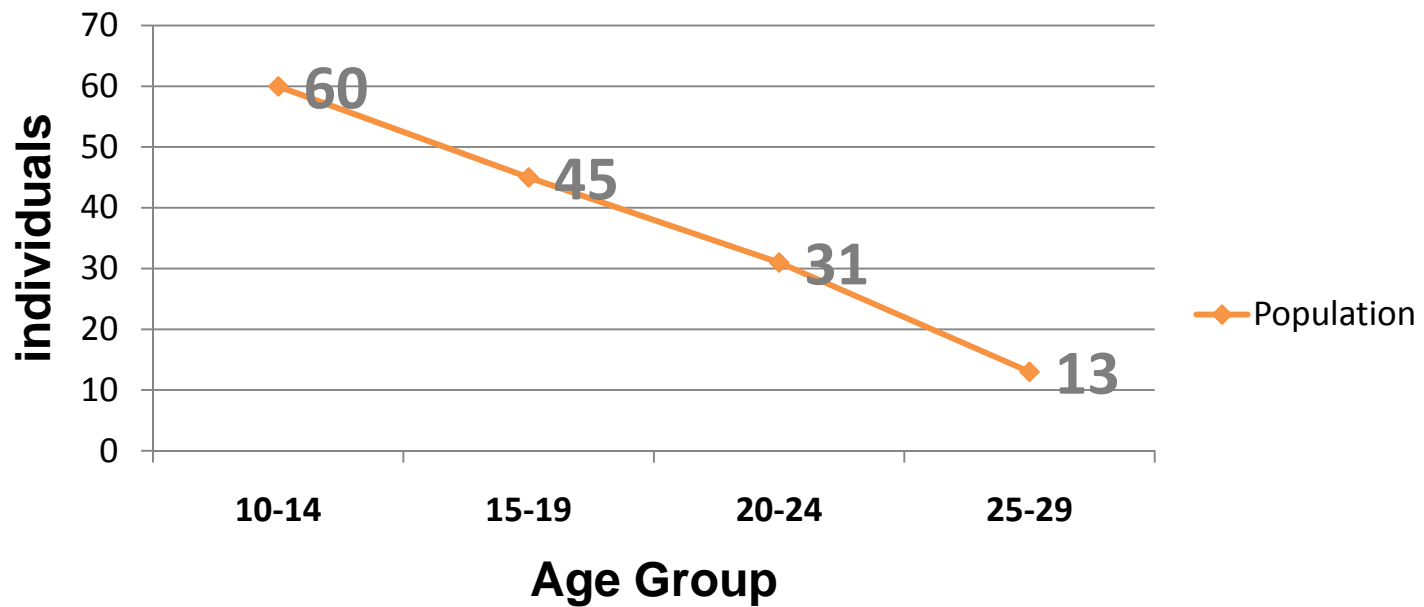
- Women in charge of finances
- Population imbalance

How remittances are spent



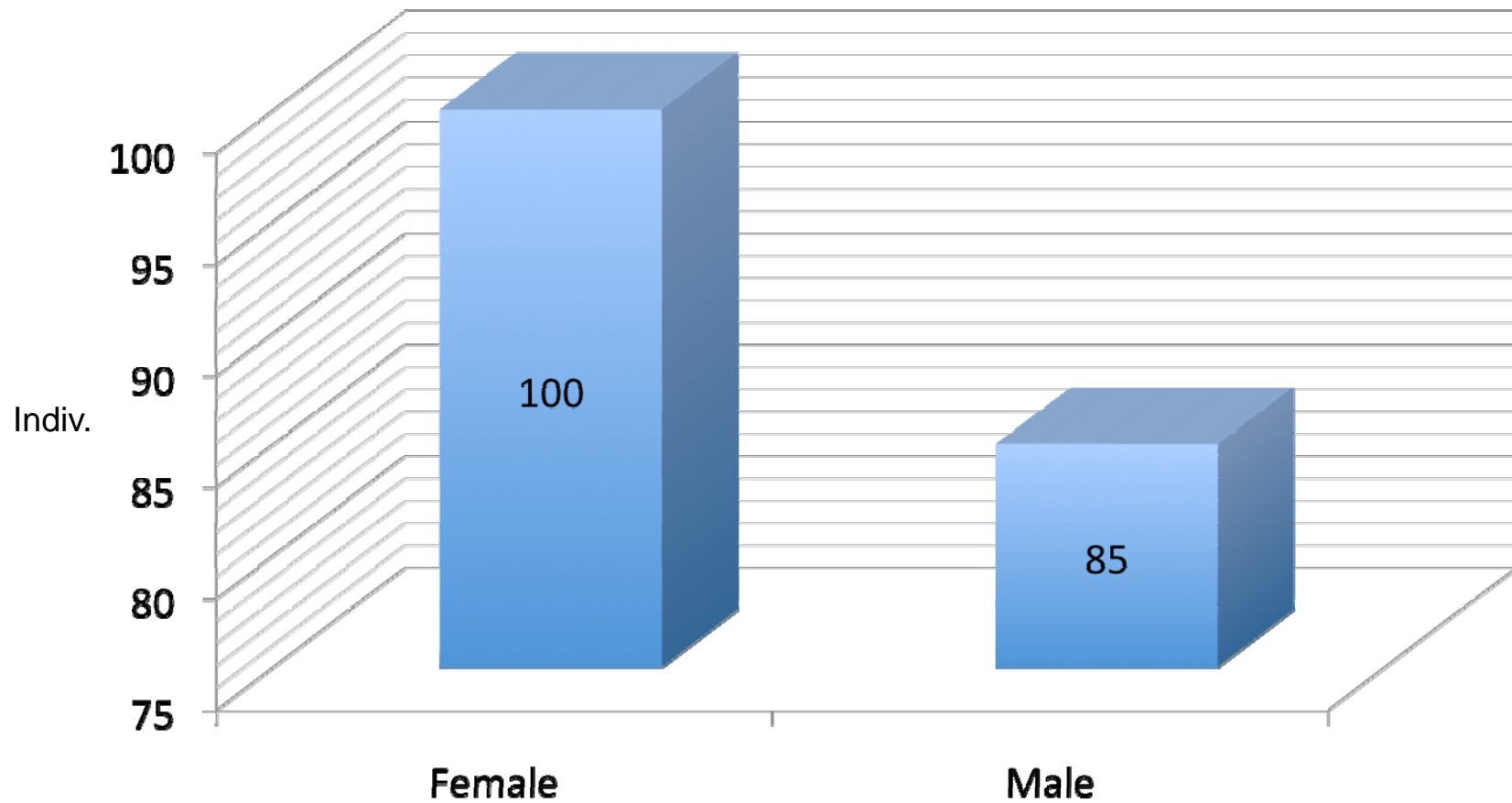
Source: Mexican Migration Field Research Project,
Center Comparative Research Studies, UCSD, 2008

Youth Population in Bicuhuini – Large Decline



Source: Mexican 2005 Census

Gender (Masculinity) Index – Unbalanced



Source: Mexican 2005 Census

METHODOLOGY

Stage 1: Quantitative

- Ethno-Surveys, individual level

N = 98 (159 questions, 1-2 hours, 1 week) 15-65 years of age

Stage 2:Qualitative

- Informal Interviews - 10 people
- Participant Observations - 40 hours in person in village center

Stage 3: Post-field contact

- Informal Online Instant Messenger (MSN)
 - 50 hours, 30 conversations over 3 months
- Three Chief Informants - teenage males

FINDINGS



1.) First Adopters

First adopters of cellphone are primarily youth who attend school in another town



2.) Older and Newer Technology

caseta is still the primary mode of communication for local and transborder communication

CASETA – only landline in Bicuhuini



CASETA – announcements, store, phone calls



OBSERVATIONS of the CASETA



Observations

- Majority of calls placed by older people or wives with spouse in the US
- Phone numbers saved on crumpled pieces of paper or little booklets
- Maximum of two people could be squeezed into the booth

Reported

- More calls received than placed
- Majority of calls received on weekend
- Most calls received from the US

CELLPHONE USAGE AMONG YOUTH



Observations

- always placed visibly
- always located within reach or in their hands
- took the phone out of their pants
- played games

Reported

- only used to call family when away from Sabinillo (at school)
- not used for sending text messages between friends
- mothers purchased the phone
- shared within family
- only one phone per family

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS FOR WHY YOUTH ARE the FIRST USERS?

1.) Primary income earner is in the US

Fathers only come home once every 1-4 years. Their children then become the proxy Representative of the level of wealth in a family. A cellphone is symbolic of the status of families who have a father working in the states since this is considered a purchase beyond subsistence.

2.) Remittances - wife controls finances.

Only youth with fathers in the US sending remittances can afford a cellphone. The remittance is sent to the mother and it is up to the mother's full discretion for how to spend the money. Women play an instrumental intermediary role in obtaining the cellphone and legitimizing the purchase.

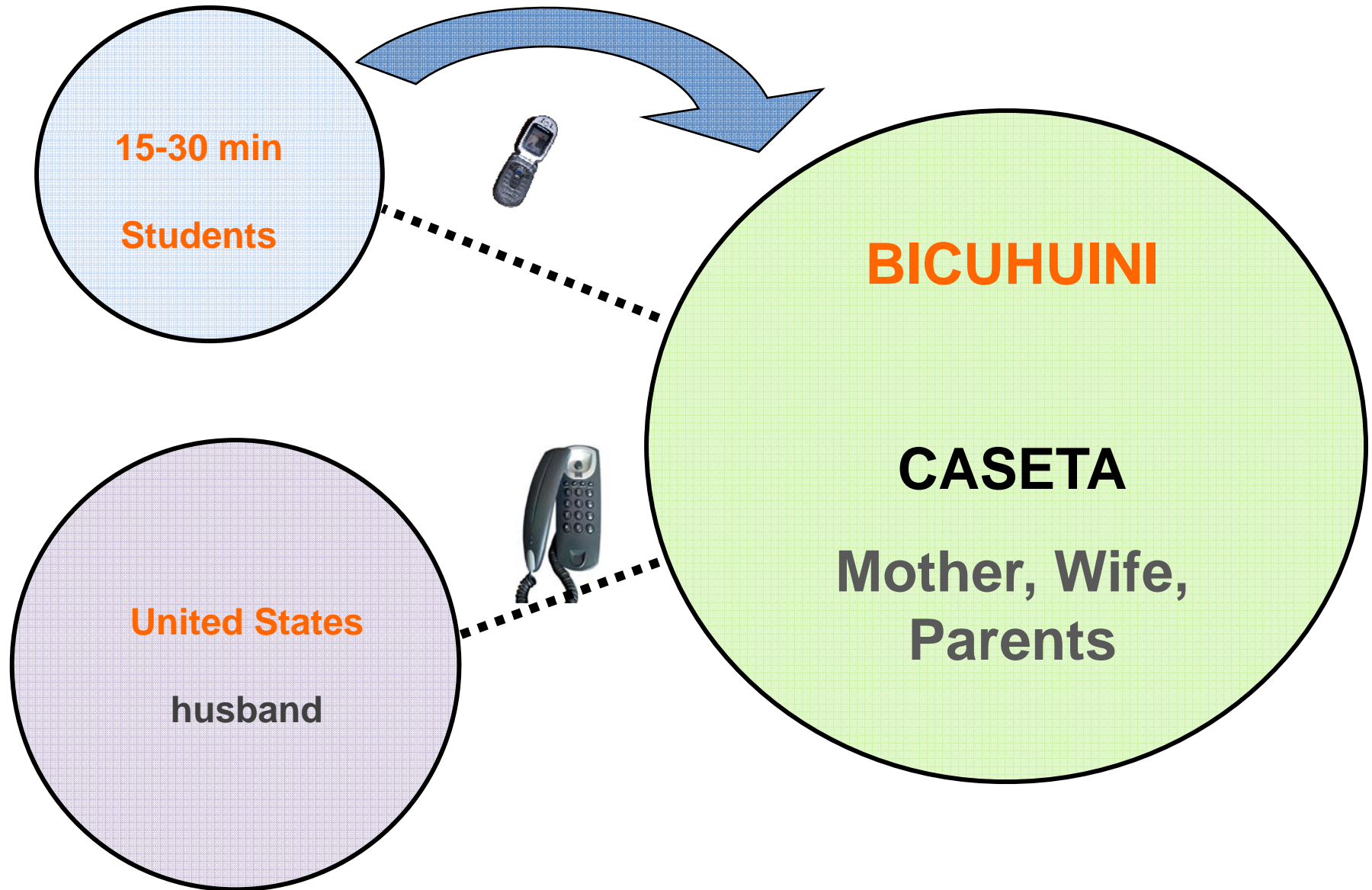
3.) Safety

Since cellphone owners were mobile youth attending school in another village, students are able to call back to the caseta if they are late or need to contact their mother.

UNEXPECTED SOCIAL USAGE OF CELLPHONE

1. cellphone symbolizes wealth and identity
2. new boundary between youth w/ and w/out cellphones
3. builds on inequalities between families w/ and w/out father in the US
3. symbolic meaning between family members

TELECOMMUNICATION SNAPSHOT



BRIDGING PRACTICE to the LITERATURE

New Communication Technology → Social Ties?

- family ties *within* the village = cellphone
- Transborder ties between US and Mexico = caseta → family ties

New Technology Displaces Older Technology?

- Used alongside, inter-generational, geography, telecom policy

First Adopters Mobile Professionals?

- Mobile youth, migrant families

LESSONS LEARNED in the FIELD

1.) Selection bias in gender

2.) Telecommunication policy

3.) Confusion in Telecommunication concepts

- Telefono fijo
- Celular
- Movil

EXAMPLE of CONFUSION WITH TERMS

MOBILE

móvil (always cellular)

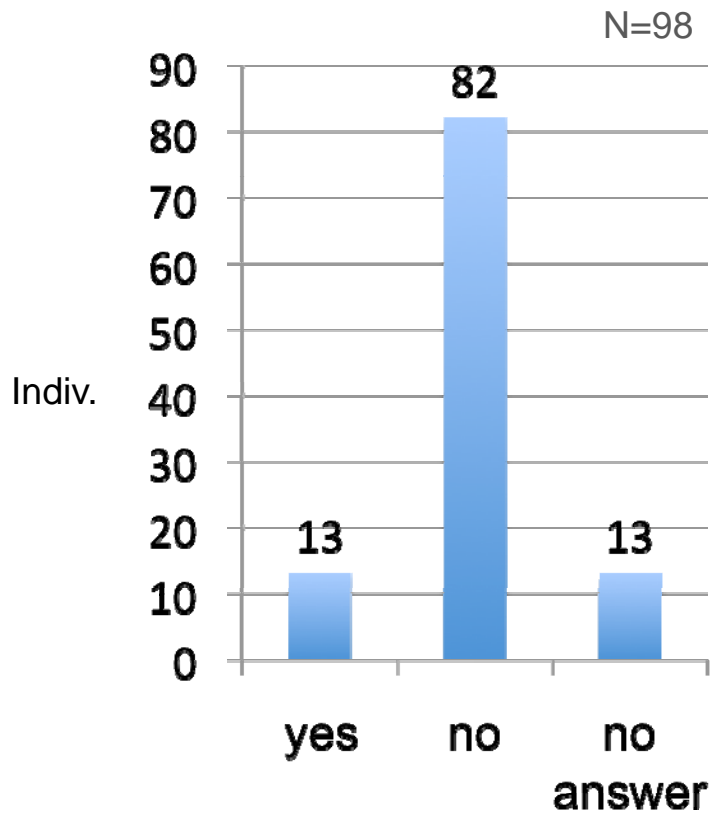
NOT MOBILE

fijo (sometimes cellular)

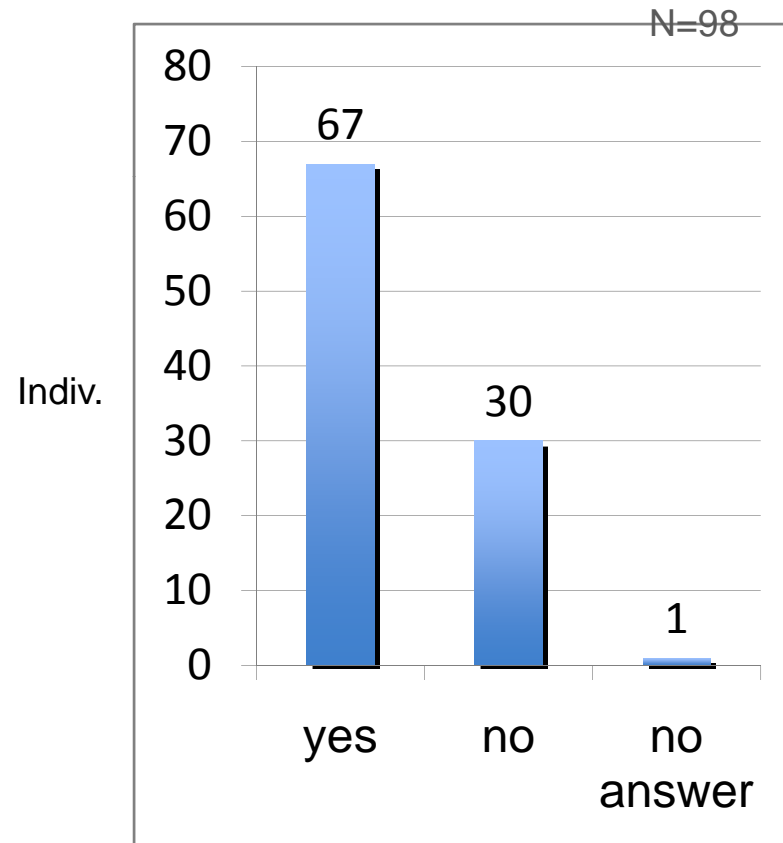
linea (never cellular)

Misleading Survey Questions

telephone landline owners (*fijo*)



cellphone owners (*móvil*)



Source: Mexican Migration Field Research Project, Center Comparative Research Studies, UCSD, 2008

NEXT PHASE: TECHNOLOGY CO-DEVELOPMENT

Minimum invasiveness, maximum benefits

Work with village for entire co-development cycle

Keep in mind

- Long-term relationship
- Introduce new stratifications
- Intensity previous inequalities

OK!

Two Findings

- 1.) first adopters mobile youth
- 2.) relationship between caseta and cellphones

Next Steps

- 1.) follow-up fieldwork
- 2.) technology deployment

