



## SCHEDULE

9.00-9.40	Vincent Maher	Mobile media in South Africa	New Science Lecture Theatre
9.40-10.00	Tea and coffee		TB Davie Seminar Room, Otto Beit Building
10.00-10.20	Jonathan Donner and Shikoh Gitau	New Paths: Exploring Mobile-Only Internet Use in Urban South Africa	
10.20-10.40	Marlon Parker	Mobile counselling: The Angel project on MXit	
10.40-11.00	Gary Marsden	Designing mobile applications	
11.00-11.20	Peter Benjamin	The Cell-Life Project	
12.20-12.40	Tea and coffee		
11.20-11.40	Tanja Bosch	Cellphones and health communication in South Africa	
11.40-12.00	Ana Deumert and Oscar Masinyane	Mobile language choices — The use of English and isiXhosa in text messages (SMS)	
12.00-12.20	Marion Walton and Tino Kreutzer	Public and Private: Mobile Instant Messaging and young South Africans	
12.20-12.40	Adele Botha	The weak ties that bind. A online mobile maths tutoring experience	

## VISITING LECTURER - VINCENT MAHER

Vincent Maher is the portfolio manager for social media at Vodacom, South Africa's largest mobile telecommunications company. His flagship product is The Grid, a location-based social network and instant messaging platform. Previously he was the strategist at the Mail & Guardian Online and co-founder of Amatemu.com, the South African blog aggregator and analytics system. Before that he was Director of the New Media Lab at the Rhodes University School of Journalism & Media Studies, the managing director of Digital Commerce and a multimedia director at VWV Interactive.

He has worked in the online media industry since 1996, has presented papers at many international conferences and specializes in profitable innovation in emerging markets.

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## RESEARCHING MOBILE MEDIA IN SOUTH AFRICA

Most South Africans now use a mobile phone. Many of these phones are being used as all-purpose media and connectivity devices, and this relatively new range of uses provides several challenges to researchers who attempt to understand how and why people are choosing to use their phones, or how phones, mobile media and software applications could be redesigned to better serve their users. It may be easier to address these questions if researchers can make connections between technology disciplines (such as computer science, information systems, and HCI) and disciplines focused on communication, such as media studies, marketing, linguistics, anthropology and visual and cultural studies. This broader focus could be useful both to researchers who want to evaluate and design innovative development projects and to those who want to account for the rapidly shifting practices of everyday communication in South Africa.

**Commercial media and marketing** South African commercial media are noticing that their audiences are shifting their attention to converged mobile communications networks, which have been called the 'seventh mass medium'. South African advertisers spent R250 million on mobile advertising campaigns in 2007, evidence that this is a burgeoning new platform. In this context, the rapid rise of the mobile Internet presents a significant challenge to the current leaders in the local online publishing industry. The mobile Web looks very different to the Web used by deskbound users – just because people can access any website from their

phone does not mean that they choose to do so. Are the 'walled gardens' of the leading mobile properties in fact holding their audiences captive or are they making it possible for them to explore the Web further, and to contribute to broader public discourse? How will locative features be used, and by whom? How do South Africans distribute their attention between local publishers and global sites such as Google and Facebook? What kinds of features and content have contributed to the rapid success of the relatively obscure publishers who have become highly popular among South African mobile users?

**Development communication** A range of innovative development projects promote the use of mobile technologies to broaden access to banking, education, government and health communication. While many of these projects have relied on SMS texting in the past, how will communication strategies shift as people enjoy greater access to a wider range of media options?

**Youth culture** Young South Africans are adept at negotiating the range of communications options available to them, and routing around those that do not appeal. Low cost and low-bandwidth instant messaging and social networking applications such as MXit have become a significant force, driving down the costs of interpersonal communication, opening a new space for youth culture, and introducing many to the Internet for the first time. How does this space relate to other expressions of youth culture, to consumer culture, and to broader civic and public discourses and expressions of identity?

**Moral panics and media regulation** Like teens around the world, young South Africans often use mobile technology to evade adult regulation and surveillance, a trend which led to many South African schools banning cell

phones outright. A number of moral panics about teens' access to pornography and risks of sexual abuse of children in particular have followed. Heightened government interest in regulating online and mobile media contributed to the drafting of controversial proposed new amendments to the Films and Publications Act.

**Convergence culture** Broadcasters, publishers and advertisers increasingly operate within a 'convergence culture' and storytelling now embraces a range of platforms. Here, researchers can investigate how traditional media genres change as they go mobile (such as, for example 'mobizines', 'mobidocs' and 'mobisoaps'), while locative features and the rise of user-generated content promise to give rise to new genres and applications in the future.

**Social media** Mobile audiences look less and less like 'audiences' -- people now use media as and when they need to, while their phones also allow them to be media producers and distributors. For this reason, media researchers may need to adopt methods from HCI in order to study mobile phones in use.

Similarly, the nuances of interpersonal communication are just as important as the strategies of mass communication in the study of mobile media. Social media are governed by 'Web2.0' principles which allow users to connect with one another and cultivate participatory communities. These communities identify, generate and filter valued forms of content for one another rather than relying on the editorial judgements of paid professionals. This 'we media' is often seen as a new and more empowering alternative to the high-handed arrogance of mass communication. Despite its democratic aura, in its current form social media remains the province of a relatively small elite, and it remains to be

seen how soon widespread mobile access will alter this pattern in South Africa.

**Political economy** While media may have become more conversational, mobile network operators and aggregators (search, content and social networks) nonetheless hold significant cultural, economic and political power and wield extensive gatekeeping and surveillance powers. The spaces they provide for community are also proprietary spaces, and they do not have the journalistic or public service mandates of traditional broadcasters. Charging micro-payments for communication means that mobile operators can exclude low income communities from full cultural and social participation if their rates are not affordable, thus potentially replacing the 'digital divide' with an economic 'participation gap'. In addition, the ecological impact of mobile technologies remains an area of concern.

**Multilingualism and multimodality** Researchers are paying attention to the specificity of local languages and the linguistic, cultural and generic changes that are taking place in mobile communication. As photography, image editing, video, audio and animation production become more widely accessible on mobile platforms, multimodality will also need to become a central research focus. As these forms of expression are better understood in the context of mobile communication, they have the potential to suggest new interfaces, search algorithms and design principles for mobile media and applications.

## PARTICIPANTS

Vincent Maher	vincent@vincentmaher.com
Jonathan Donner	jdonner@microsoft.com
Shikoh Gitau	
Marlon Parker	parkerm@cput.ac.za
Gary Marsden	gary.marsden@uct.ac.za
Peter Benjamin	peter@cell-life.org.za
Tanja Bosch	tanja.bosch@uct.ac.za
Ana Deumert	ana.deumert@gmail.com
Oscar Masinyana	oscar_masinyana@yahoo.com
Marion Walton	marion.walton@uct.ac.za
Tino Kreutzer	tino.kreutzer@gmail.com
Adele Botha	adele.botha@gmail.com

UCT map and Venues

