John J. Powers, PhD

13 Fawn Drive • Wallingford, CT 06492 • 203/464-8224 • john.powers@quinnipiac.edu • johnjosephpowers.com

Research Statement

My scholarly research is primarily focused on strategic communication and emerging media, and how this information revolution has impacted individuals, families, businesses, societies, and the world as a whole. This new media has become the dominant form of sharing information and connecting between people, and this is having a profound effect. Mobile communication now commands so much of our attention that laws have been enacted to encourage us not to use our phones while driving a vehicle, and face-to-face conversation between family and friends has been diminished due to this distraction. Yet, we are more connected as a people and a world than ever before, and the possibilities and opportunities due to this current information revolution are vast and exciting.

While studying this phenomenon and its powerful impact on the developed world, it is interesting to also research the initial introduction, diffusion, and adoption of this research on individuals and communities in the underdeveloped world. My research has taken me to the remote and isolated Haitian sugarcane villages of the Dominican Republic, where tens of thousands of people live in deep poverty. These villages, known as bateyes, have no electricity, running water, bathroom facilities, very limited access to healthcare and education, and malnutrition and hunger are rampant. Yet, the digital information revolution has found its way to the people of these villages as cell phones are common, smartphones sightings are becoming a regular occurrence, news and information are flowing through access to the Internet, and many residents are now active participants in social media networks. With the arrival of emerging media in the bateyes, a transformation is taking place that includes direct and real-time communication with family and friends in other areas of the DR, Haiti, and the US; improved educational, vocational, and healthcare opportunities; immediate sharing of needs related to natural disasters; establishing partnerships between schools in the bateyes and American entities; and much more.

This research has established some interesting findings related to how modern communication technology was first introduced to people living in such isolated areas, and how that technology is rapidly diffusing among the population across all demographics. In addition, while costs of acquiring this technology and the accompanying digital service is an impediment to some, many residents are willing to spend funds in order to be part of this new media cohort even if they struggle to meet basic needs for themselves and/or their family. Research also has shown some intriguing results related to the impact on the social identity of individuals in these close-knit villages – there is a definite "in" group that has access to new media and an "out" group that does not.

I recently had a piece of this research published as a chapter in a textbook titled, "Social, Mobile, and Emerging Media Around the World." This chapter looks at how the adoption of new media in a specific village, Batey 50, is transforming the partnership between residents and visiting American service and mission teams that have been helping for many years to alleviate suffering in this community.

Over the last several years, I have had the opportunity to involve undergraduate students from Quinnipiac University and other schools in some of this research in the bateyes of the Dominican Republic. I have also mentored several global public health undergraduates from QU, as well as numerous medical school and graduate level students from a number of universities including QU, UConn, Yale, SCSU, and High Point.

In addition, I also served in 2018-2019 as a fellow at the Quinnipiac University Center for Teaching and Learning, where I further developed and presented my research on the potential benefits and distractions to university teaching during the age of digital media. I also an have in the works an historical study related to the media coverage of the 1969 riots in Hartford, CT, and a comparison to how information related to today's civil unrest is shared via social media and mobile video. This research was presented as a poster at the Broadcast Education Association in Las Vegas.

Moving forward, I am pursuing a research agenda that focuses on how the information highway revolution is impacting interpersonal relationships, business, media, public relations, marketing, and communication. In addition, I have a research study underway focusing on the pedagogical implications of communication students partnering with local small businesses and non-profit organizations.

Digital communication and emerging media has exploded in our society and around the world in the last decade, and it is a truly exciting time to be a scholar within this field. My research continues to investigate the dynamics of this technology and applications, in a myriad of settings, and focus on the implications it is having on individuals and our world. These studies are helping with understanding the powerful effects of new media and are contributing to the debate over its positive and negative impact. Ultimately, my research is working to inform scholars, students, and the general public about the immediate and long-term effects of digital media on all of our lives.

Case Study: Mobile Communication in the Bateyes of the Dominican Republic
John J. Powers, PhD

The Story of Alekar

Alekar awakens to the heat of a new day in the same shack he has lived in for most of the past three decades. The sun has just come up on this already steamy July morning in the vast sugarcane fields of the eastern Dominican Republic, and he is preparing to begin the same routine he has followed for most days during those 30 years. His shack is made up of scraps of sheet metal and wood held together with some nails and old rope, fastened to supports that really are just branches and small trunks of trees. His roof is a mixture of sheet metal and leaves, only partially covering his tiny room and barely deflecting the rain from soaking his few possessions. The bed he is laying in is nothing more than a torn piece of cardboard sitting on the broken piece of concrete that is his floor. On top of the cardboard, he has carefully laid all the clothing he owns – a few tattered long-sleeve shirts, one pair of pants, and a handful of t-shirts – that serve as the cushioning for his bed each night.

As Alekar prepares to begin his work cutting sugarcane by hand, he pulls on the rubber boots that cover his feet each day in the fields, and he grabs his trusty machete. This has been his vocation since he took that harrowing journey from his native Haiti as a means of survival when he was just 24 years old. He had been promised so much more – steady work, free housing, fair pay, adequate food supply, healthcare, and a way to keep his young family alive. Instead he was presented a new reality of deep poverty, weariness and sense of hopelessness.

Almost 30 years later, it is hard for Alekar to even remember the details of his previous life in Haiti. He could have never imagined that he would never return home. Left behind were his wife and three small children, who were the motivation for him to leave Haiti to cut sugarcane in the neighboring Dominican Republic, and has never spoken to his family since.

And so Alekar lives out his existence alone in the searing poverty of the Dominican batey, having no opportunity to return home and no means to contact his family back in Haiti. His wife and children (who are now grown and presumably parents themselves) also have had no opportunity to communicate with their husband and father. Since they have not heard from him since he left that fateful morning for the Dominican Republic over three decades ago, it is assumed that he has died or has abandoned his family back in Haiti.

For Alekar and countless others like him living in harsh and unforgiving conditions, new communication technology like mobile phones are just beginning to enter their world and are having a profound impact on their daily life and circumstances. No longer will families living in these harsh conditions say goodbye to a loved one and never hear from them again. The digital information revolution has found its way to the people of Batey 50 and others like it as cell phones are becoming common and even include some smartphone sighting. News and information are flowing through these mobile phones, and many residents are now active participants in social media networks. In addition, visiting American service and mission teams have been partnering with local Dominican NGOs for many years to help alleviate suffering in Batey 50. With the arrival of mobile communication in Batey 50, a transformation is taking place that also includes direct and real-time communication with friends in the US, frequent updates to enhance fundraising efforts, immediate sharing of needs related to natural disasters, establishing partnerships between the school in this village and American sponsors, and much more.

The Communication Revolution

There is no disputing that the communication revolution involving digital technologies, systems, and applications has reached every corner of our world. In the United States, and most of the developed world, the still growing pervasiveness of the Internet and other networks,

mobile phones, and social media platforms have transformed the way individuals, groups, organizations, and cultures share information and relate to one another. Many past studies have investigated the influence and power of communication technologies like film, radio and television on individuals, their relationships, and societies as a whole, as they have diffused or been increasingly accepted in the cultures within which they were introduced. These mediums, and now the technologies associated with the digital media environment have so powerfully interjected themselves into people's lives that it is argued that many have become performers or characters in their own version of a reality television series or made-for-tv movie (Gabler, 2011). The lives of many who have adopted these communication mediums and their content seem to have become a piece of an interesting narrative that is part of the fabric of the entertainment machine or world. They need to be a part of this realm to avoid feeling invisible or even non-existent. As many scholars have noted, the more recent digital media and their applications have connected people within communities and across cultures in new and unprecedented ways, sometimes greatly changing the way they think, behave, and view the world (Howard & Hussein, 2011).

The digital communication revolution is a whole new paradigm that has engulfed us individually and collectively, particularly over the last 15 years or so. Cell phone technology (for the purposes of this case study, cell phone and mobile phone will be used interchangeably), in particular, has revolutionized the world in which we live, dramatically altering individual, family, organizational, and professional life. For example, the vast majority of people in the United States now own and carry a cell phone with them at most times – 95% of Americans as of January 2017 (Pew Research Center, 2017) – and thus are available to be reached or reach others in an instant, day or night. And with the influx of smartphones, where owning one is now

considered the norm in the developed world, instant communication through phone calls has expanded to texting, social media use, Internet access, video viewing and recording, and more.

With this influx of new communication technologies, many scholars are interested in studying how they affect development in various countries and cultures around the world. The unique impact of cell phones on underdeveloped regions of the world is of particular interest.

"The cell phone is the single most transformative technology for development," commented renowned economist Jeffrey Sachs, professor at Columbia University and director of the United Nations Millennium Villages Project (Voigt, 2011, para. 4). According to the United Nations, over six billion people in the world have access to a cell phone (not necessarily owning a phone, but having reasonable access to one in their community or family), in comparison to the 4.5 billion people who have access to a toilet (Wang, 2013). This almost universal adoption of cell phone technology worldwide took less than 20 years to happen. Additional studies show that even with horrifyingly low wages, poor families in developing regions of the world are willing to spend money on a cell phone, and as their incomes rise, a higher percentage is spent on cell phones than even on healthcare or education (Corbett, 2008).

There can be no debate that mobile phone technology is having a profound impact on interpersonal communication for the majority of the people in our world today, including those who are more disadvantaged. Studies done in Bangladesh, one of the world's most densely populated and impoverished countries, show that mobile phones have improved communication and quality of life (Wong, 2008). In addition, sub-Saharan Africa has seen an explosion of cell phone usage, with almost 70 percent of the population now having available cell coverage. Along with reduced telecommunication costs, this has led to improved economies, business opportunities, agricultural benefits, and more (Sey, 2011).

It is clear from this quick review of data that mobile phones have significant individual and social ramifications in the developed world. Now that this technology has reached or is on the brink of reaching many areas of the underdeveloped world, it is interesting to consider the impact of digital media in this setting. It is helpful to investigate and understand how the diffusion of cell phones are affecting organizations, individuals, families, and social interactions at an early stage of acceptance in these underdeveloped communities.

For the purposes of this case study, the focus is on the people of the bateyes of the Dominican Republic and how the adoption of cell phone technology has occurred and now influences the lives of individuals, families, and others in this unique cultural. This new media has found its way to the bateyes as cell towers have popped up in the vast sugar cane fields of the eastern Dominican Republic. These cell towers connect major population centers such as La Romana, Higuey, and El Seibo, and provide crucial cellular service to the powerful sugarcane companies that operate in the bateyes.

Understanding the Bateyes of the Dominican Republic

A batey is a remote sugarcane village located in the Dominican Republic, which houses between 125 and 1,000 people. Tens of thousands of Haitian migrant workers and their families currently live in the bateyes of the Dominican Republic. Haiti occupies the eastern one-third of the island of Hispaniola and is deemed the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere (Haiti Overview, 2017). This was magnified with the catastrophic earthquake of January 2010 and the more recent Category 4 hurricane that struck in October of 2016. With a continually dire situation in Haiti, many men are eager to leave their impoverished native land to migrate to the other side of the island of Hispaniola and cut sugarcane in the Dominican Republic. Most live in these bateyes, which are in remote villages spread out among the sprawling cane fields located in

the southeastern portion of the Dominican Republic. These sugarcane cutters, along with their families, live in very difficult conditions in the bateyes. The villages almost always lack electricity, running water, sanitation facilities, adequate housing, educational opportunities, and access to healthcare (So, 2006).

The sugarcane worker is always male, and on average he works 12-14 hours a day, six days a week during the cutting season to barely provide for his family (Refworld, 2002). He is out in the cane fields at daybreak with machete in hand, and his pay is based on the amount of sugarcane he can cut, collect, and transport to the weighing station by the end of the day. A productive, physically fit batey worker can earn $6-$10 a day on average for cutting several tons of sugarcane (Hartley, 2009).

In addition, the people of the typical batey face difficulties associated with being illegal immigrants. Even though most batey workers were encouraged and recruited to leave their native Haiti for a better life in the Dominican sugarcane fields, once there, they are most often not endowed with any rights or official status. In fact, batey workers and their families are systemically denied access to education, healthcare, and other basic human rights. Dominican officials at a moment's notice can send them back to Haiti, and children born in the bateyes are not considered citizens of the Dominican Republic (and are also not given Haitian citizenship since they were born in the Dominican Republic, thus becoming a people without a country) (So, 2006).

Cell Phones in Batey 50

The physical isolation of the bateyes, combined with the lack of most digital media technologies, leads to a deep desire within this population to become part of the modern communication world. Despite the abject poverty, mobile phone technology and their associated

applications diffused at a very rapid pace in these villages, despite the cost pressures associated with this new technology and services.

Specifically, this case study focuses on a Haitian sugarcane village known as Batey 50, located in the remote area northeast of the city of La Romana. Batey 50 is set in the vast sugarcane fields in between the cities of El Seibo, Higuey, and La Romana, and has long been known as one of the poorest bateyes in the eastern Dominican Republic. This village has approximately 150 men, women, and children living there, with many residents calling it home for their entire lives. Volunteers from the United States first became aware of Batey 50, through partnerships with El Buen Samaritano Hospital in La Romana, approximately 10 years ago. When first arriving, US volunteers were shocked that people lived in these deplorable conditions – for example, homes would barely be considered shacks, with scraps of metal and wood tied or nailed to tree branches that served as a frame. Floors were either dirt or broken concrete, and the roof was ripped pieces of corrugated tin or even leaves from a nearby palm or banana tree. There was no electricity, no running water, and no outhouses or toilet facilities to speak of in Batey 50. A volunteer medical team from the United States reported after their initial clinic in this village in 2009 that the population, as a whole, was malnourished, unhealthy, and lethargic.

As of 2017, through partnerships between US volunteers and El Buen Samaritano Hospital in La Romana, Batey 50 is a transformed community in several ways. Every shack has been replaced with a new cinderblock home, a school with three small classrooms has been built for all children up to grade 4, bio-sand water filters have been installed in homes to bring clean water to each family, a sustainable food garden with a solar-powered water pump has been developed on the far side of the village, and there is now even a park with a gazebo and playground for small children. In addition to the physical changes to Batey 50 during these ten

years, there is a noticeable and palpable joy in the residents. The church and community have become vibrant and active, and locals have even renamed the village from its ominous and degrading number system to "Batey Esperanza," or in English, "Batey Hope."

The influx of American volunteers in this village over many weeks at different times of the year brought about other changes within Batey 50. Residents of this batey for decades lived in a stark isolation from the urban and more developed areas of the Dominican Republic and certainly from the rest of the world. There were no forms of communication technology in Batey 50 – no telephones (landline or cell phones), no Internet or computer connectivity, and a scattering of older radios and black and white televisions (which almost always did not work due to lack of batteries to power them). Now there were hundreds of Americans in this village during five full weeks throughout the year, almost all sporting cell phones and in more recent years, smartphones.

As US volunteers spent a week in Batey 50, friendships and a comfort level on both sides developed quickly. In addition, with the American volunteers came a number of Dominican workers from the city of La Romana into Batey 50 on a regular basis. These Dominicans were often administrators, foreman, translators, and workers from El Buen Samaritano Hospital in La Romana. This group of Dominicans almost universally owned their own cell phone or smartphone. Residents in Batey 50 became familiar with the capabilities and functioning of the smartphone through constant observation as well as trying these phones themselves – taking photos, making phone calls, sending text messages, utilizing social media, accessing the Internet, shooting video, and more. Most of the very young children have grown up their entire lives observing, viewing, and trying the latest iPhones, Android Phones, Blackberry's, and other more

traditional cell phones, despite the fact that they still live in abject poverty with no electricity or other resources.

Impact of Cell Phones on Batey 50

Edgar Benitez is a Haitian-Dominican physician who moved to the United States with his American wife five years ago to continue his medical studies. Up to this point, he has lived in La Romana his entire life and has worked with the Maranatha Mission and El Buen Samaritano Hospital for decades in the bateyes to bring assistance to the people in need. Some of his own family still live in those sugarcane villages surround the city of La Romana. Dr. Benitez has a unique perspective on life in the bateyes as he adjusts to life in the United States. He often mentions to his family and friends how challenging it has been for him to adapt to the different interpersonal interactions, from not saying "hello" to every person he passes on the street to avoiding picking up a random cute child at the local Walmart. These are all customary and accepted interactions in the Dominican Republic and the bateyes, but in the United States, they are viewed as overly aggressive and outside of the norm.

Dr. Benitez has also observed the spread of mobile phone technology in the bateyes of the Dominican Republic, and while he expresses some astonishment at how quickly this has occurred in these undeveloped regions of his country, he also recognizes some relational fallout from this phenomenon. "Before people in the bateyes had mobile phones to distract them from each other, there was a very powerful connection between people in those villages," he commented.

They spent huge amounts of time talking, visiting, and were much more concerned with each other than what I have observed here in the United States. I have noticed since moving here that in the US, everyone is very concerned with their social media first and their personal

interactions second. And that is something that concerns me in the bateyes as more and more people get connected through digital technology. (E. Benitez, personal communication, November 30, 2016)

As Dr. Benitez has noted, there are already interpersonal and social ramifications confronting the people of Batey 50 and other villages from the very recent diffusion of cell phones in their community. In addition, there are a number of other important insights from studying this rapid spread of mobile phone technology in Batey 50.

All Ages Desire Digital Communication.

As is the case with the spread of new media in the developed world, the younger generation expressed the strongest desire to have access to modern communication technology and applications (McMillan & Morrison, 2006; Baker, 2009; Velghe, 2012). In the case of younger people in Batey 50, this desire was described by interview subjects as a desperate need for information, communication, and connectivity. For example, Wili, a 16-year-old resident of Batey 50 exclaimed, "I just want to connect regularly with my friends in the DR, Haiti, and especially the United States, and I need a phone to do this."

Older residents of Batey 50 also shared a very strong desire to own or have access to a mobile phone. Most residents 35 years and above in this village expressed a passion to have their own cell phone so they could call and communicate with family in the Dominican Republic and in Haiti, similar to the story of Alekar referenced at the start of this chapter. And for those who had access or awareness of smartphone technology, there was a strong motivation among this age group to be exposed to the Internet for the latest news stories in the DR, in the United States, and in other parts of the world.

Costs as a Factor

With this almost universal desire to own a mobile phone, the major obstacle for access to this technology was cost. There were a number of examples of people in Batey 50, both young and old, who appeared to spend money on purchasing a phone and minutes for calls and data despite the fact that they reported not having enough funds for other necessities such as food, shoes, and adequate clothing. Several individuals and families claimed to spend a large percentage of their weekly income on cell phone minutes and charging services, sharing that this digital communication opportunity was that important to them.

In addition, residents were willing to spend even more money for a reliable connection by using one of the two dominant cellular carriers in the Dominican Republic – Claro and Orange. "I would much rather pay more for more reliable cell service, even if that means I have less minutes to call or less data to use the Internet," Liliana, a resident of Batey 50 with a newer smartphone, commented.

Cell Phone Technology and Applications

Specifically, Claro and Orange are similar in price and considered to have more reliable service than a number of lower cost carriers. Claro's cell service covers the majority of the country, utilizing LTE Band 4, UMTS 850, and GSM/GPRS 850/190 technology. It is understood by those who live and work in the isolated bateyes that Claro has better service in these areas, and is by far the carrier of choice. In contrast, Orange uses LTE Band 3, UMTS 900, and GMS/GPRS 900/1900, providing solid service in the major cities but having spotty coverage in other areas. Lower cost carriers such as Vive and Trilogy utilize GSM 1900 technology but are widely known for having very slow and unreliable service ("International Wireless Carriers, Coverage, and Service," 2018). It was found that the vast majority of batey residents, despite severe cost concerns, chose Claro or Orange over the lower cost services.

The majority of the residents of Batey 50 utilize a "candy bar" or flip style phones, either purchased directly from a street vendor or small store in one of the nearby cities (La Romana, El Seibo, or Higuey), or given to them by family, friend, or a visiting American volunteer. A small minority of people in the village use a smartphone, normally an Android phone or an older iPhone. It was clear from conversations that the smartphone owners in Batey 50 belonged to an informal group that excluded those using older phones and those without any phone. Cards that provided minutes for the main cellular carriers (Claro and Orange) were available in at least two locations in Batey 50, making calling, texting, and accessing data for social media and/or Internet instantly available.

For those who owned a smartphone, there were two dominant applications among the users in Batey 50 – Facebook and WhatsApp. Every owner of a smartphone in Batey 50 was found to utilize Facebook on their device, making them much active participants in this social network. Residents talked about connections with American friends they had met during mission/service trips to Batey 50, and described current happenings in the lives of their US friends in great detail. Many other members of Batey 50 also claimed to have a Facebook account, but were only able to access this network very infrequently in Internet cafes when visiting one of the major cities in the region. In addition, WhatsApp was used widely for texting family and friends in the DR, Haiti, and the United States. Very few residents with smartphones used data-heavy applications such as YouTube or Instagram.

Access to Electricity

One of the main impediments to the spread of cell phone technology in the underdeveloped world has to do with access to electricity for charging purposes. There is no electricity available in Batey 50, making the issue of charging phones a major problem.

However, residents worked to conquer this obstacle and developed several systems to make phone charging possible. First, a couple of families owned car batteries in their homes and would create adaptors to the actual phone charger in order to provide power for their phones. One other family in Batey 50 purchased a small solar panel with a power cord for their phone attached and placed this on the roof of their house so they could charge their device each day. The community as a whole created a system where one resident would collect all phones every few days and drive them to a nearby town that had electricity. For a small fee (10 pesos each), he would spend most of his day in this town charging the cell phones of Batey 50.

One couple in Batey 50 used this situation to develop an entrepreneurial solution. Tony and Altagracia (he is a cane cutter earning about $5/day and she is a stay at home mom) took out a large loan in order to purchase a solar panel, two batteries, and an inverter. This became the main charging station for almost the entire Batey 50. This couple saw a great need in their community and invested in solving the problem of charging cell phones for their neighbors, and at a reasonable cost to residents. They were making a loan payment each month and still earning a reasonable profit – they paid about $30US/month toward the loan and were bringing in around $90US/month in gross revenue).

It is clear that the people of Batey 50 were willing to pay hard-earned and limited money in order to use their phones. In particular, the availability of a charging station at the home of Tony and Altagracia in the village led to a huge increase in cell phone and digital communication usage in Batey 50. Previously, residents reported paying 10 pesos for a friend to charge their phone once or twice a week in a nearby town. Now the same people were willing to pay 25 pesos per charge at Tony and Altagracia's home and utilize this service more frequently than just once or twice a week.

Social Change

In October 1995, during the opening ceremony of Telecom 95 in Geneva, Switzerland, Nelson Mandela said, "In the twenty-first century, the capacity to communicate will almost certainly be a key human right. Eliminating the distinction between the information-rich and information-poor is also critical to eliminating economic and other inequalities between North and South, and to improving the life of all humanity" (Mandela, 1995). As mobile phones have become adopted by a significant segment of the Batey 50 community, change has taken place in the social system. Residents now had regular contact with distant family and friends that before was impossible. Previously, those relationships were often forever severed as family members and friends left home to pursue work and a better life in other locations. Communication is now also taking place through phone calls, texting, and social media with friends in the United States, including the sharing of specific needs of the individual, their family, or the village as a whole. There was now widespread sharing of information and news through the Internet accessed on smartphones, and conversations were being held among these formerly isolated people on such topics as American politics, the crisis in Venezuela, Major League Baseball, and more.

These new communication opportunities are more than just casual conversations between family and friends – there are many ramifications related to enhanced information sharing between the people of the bateyes and partners in the United States. Immediate needs of the people of villages like Batey 50 are now shared in almost real-time. For example, Hurricane Maria's destruction of the sustainable food garden in the fall of 2017 was immediately communicated with partners in the US. Funds were raised and the garden was rebuilt by residents and a mission team from Connecticut one month after the storm. In addition, there is

frequent communication between the small school in Batey 50 and American sponsors, coming by way of phone calls, texts, and social media messages on a regular basis.

In essence, through the availability and relative affordability of mobile phones, most residents of Batey 50 are now able to connect and be part of the digital networks that dominate much of world, including phone calls, basic texting and some social media platforms. This is a major change in the lives of the batey residents – for the first time, those with digital technology were now part of the two-way conversations taking place across the world. These cell phones were not just viewed as communication tools. Instead, they have become critical elements of personal and social identity. The residents of Batey 50 now consider themselves to be equal partners in real-time conversations, and they clearly identified as citizens of the world.

Conclusion

As for Alekar, despite the fact that cell phone technology has spread rapidly in Batey 50, he still has not had any communication with his wife and children back in Haiti. Mostly this can be attributed to the deep poverty of his native land and the lack of reliable infrastructure and communications systems in Haiti. However, through the availability of cell phones in his village, Alekar has made contact with other family members who also left Haiti years ago to seek a better life. Through a neighbor's smartphone, Alekar was able to track down a brother who now lives in Argentina through Facebook. After some initial connection using Facebook's Messenger app, Alekar had a short phone conversation with his brother, his first such connection in over 30 years. Despite the joy that this digital reunion has brought, he continues to seek ways to use this new communication technology to locate his wife and children.

References

AT&T. (n.d.). International Wireless Carriers, Coverage, and Service. Retrieved January 20,

2018, from

https://www.att.com/travelguide/coverage/coverage_details.jsp?CIDL=214&MNC=CIN

G

Corbett, S. (2008). Can the cellphone help end global poverty. The New York Times, 13, 2008.

Gabler, N. (2011). Life: the movie: how entertainment conquered reality. Vintage

Haney, B. (Producer), & Grunebaum, E. (Director). (2007). The Price of Sugar [Motion picture].

United States: Uncommon Productions.

Hartley, Father Christopher. (2009, August). New Forms of Human Rights Abuses on Vicini

Company Sugar Cane Plantations. Retrieved June 4, 2015 from

http://eng.yspaniola.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/2009-Hartley.pdf

Howard, P. N., & Hussain, M. M. (2011). The role of digital media. Journal of democracy, 22(3),

35-48.

Kaye., K. (2016, December 28). The Top Three Data Trends of 2016. Retrieved February 03,

2017, from http://adage.com/article/digital/top-data-trends-2016/307304/

Pew Research Center. (2017, January 12). Record shares of Americans now own smartphones,

have home broadband. Retrieved February 03, 2017, from

http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/12/evolution-of-technology/

Refworld. "Illegal People": Haitians and Dominico-Haitians In The Dominican Republic. (2002,

April 2). Retrieved June 4, 2015, from http://www.refworld.org/cgi-

bin/texis/vtx/rwmain?docid=3cf2429a4

Sey, A. (2011). 'We use it different, different': Making sense of trends in mobile phone use in Ghana. New Media & Society, 13(3), 375-390.

So, Cynthia. 2006. Causes and Consequences of Undocumented Haitian Immigration in the Dominican Republic. Retrieved June 4, 2015, from http://yspaniola.org/linked%20articles/Causes%20and%20Consequences.pdf

Voigt, K. (October 9, 2011). Mobile phone: Weapon against global poverty. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/09/tech/mobile/mobile-phone-poverty/

Wang, Y. (March 25, 2013). More people have cell phones than toilets, U.N. study shows. Retrieved from http://newsfeed.time.com/2013/03/25/more-people-have-cell-phones-than-toilets-u-n-study-shows/

Wong, A. (2008). The impact of mobile phones on the new urban poor: Leaving an urban footprint? Journal of Urban Technology, 15(3), 25-38.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever had a time when you were without your cell phone for a period of time? How did that make you feel? How would you react if you were without any digital media access for an extended period of time? What would that experience be like?

2. What are your thoughts on ways to help close the digital divide that continues to expand? How does this gap in access to digital media impact people on both sides?

3. How do you think the spread of cell phones in a village like Batey 50 will impact the people interpersonally?

4. Finances become a factor for many people in the underdeveloped world when it comes to access to digital media and communication. What are some potential solutions to confronting costs as an impediment to more people gaining access to mobile phone technology?

5. What are some ways cell phones can be used to help alleviate poverty in underdeveloped areas of the world?

Index to Terms and Names

Alekar – a Haitian sugarcane cutter and long-time resident of Batey 50. Alekar left his family in his native Haiti as a young man to seek work in the cane fields of the DR, and was never able to return or communicate with them.

Batey - a Haitian sugarcane village in the Dominican Republic. Workers and their families have left Haiti seeking a better life in the DR, only to live in impoverished conditions, usually without access to electricity, clean water, toilet facilities, healthcare, secondary education, etc.

Batey 50 - a remote and isolated sugarcane village in the Dominican Republic located about an hour north of La Romana. Batey 50 was known as the poorest village in this region of country until being rebuilt and revitalized.

Diffusion of Innovations – a theory developed in 1962 in communication to help explain how an idea or product spreads and diffuses through a population or system.

Digital divide – describes the gap between people and communities that have access to digital communication technology and those who have little or no access. In this context, it defines technology access inequities related to mobile phones, Internet, and social media.

Digital Media – refers to electronic technology that sends and receives information and messages. This technology is central to the information age revolution that is currently sweeping the world and transforming all forms of communication.

Dominican Republic - country that resides on the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola, sharing this land with Haiti. Christopher Columbus landed on the island in 1492, and later established the first European settlement in the Americas in Santo Domingo. The people of the DR, numbering over 10 million, speak Spanish as their primary language.

Haiti - the western one-third of the island of Hispaniola, Haiti is currently the poorest country in

the Western Hemisphere and has experienced political instability for most of its history. Due to the deep poverty and instability of Haiti, hundreds of thousands of Haitians have migrated to the DR seeking a better life. Many of these people end up in a batey to cut sugarcane. The people speak Haitian Creole, which is a language based on French but also includes influences from Portuguese, Spanish, English, Taino, and West African languages.

La Romana – the third largest city in the Dominican Republic, located on the southeast coast, and a key economic contributor to the country. The city is known for its tourism and large resorts, as well as being surrounded by vast sugarcane fields and the Central Romana refinery.

Service/mission team - volunteer teams from churches, schools, businesses, and organizations, mostly from the United States, who have traveled to Batey 50 and other villages to help with construction projects, provide medical clinics, educational and/or religious programs, food distribution, and more.

Social media – refers to digital applications that allow the creation and sharing of information and messages within virtual networks and communities. In the context of this case study, social media refers almost exclusively Facebook.

Social identity - how a person or people understand themselves based on group memberships, leading to pride and increased self-esteem, or negative feelings if not part of a group.

Sugarcane companies - owners of the vast fields of sugarcane growing in the eastern Dominican Republic, including large multi-national companies, such as Central Romana, and family-owned farms. These owners provide housing for their cane cutters and families, which are known as bateyes.