

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The indirect and intangible impacts of a telecentre on a rural community

Ghazala Tabassum¹  | Narayanan Kulathuramaiyer¹ | Roger Harris¹ | Alvin W. Yeo² 

¹Institute of Social Informatics and Technological Innovations (ISITI), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Kota Samarahan, Malaysia

²Faculty of Computing and Mathematical Sciences, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

Correspondence

Ghazala Tabassum, Institute of Social Informatics and Technological Innovations (ISITI), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Kota Samarahan, Malaysia.
Email: ghazala.tabassum@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper explores the impact of a telecentre on the community living in Bario, a small village in the highlands of Malaysian Borneo. Specifically, it addresses indirect and intangible impacts on non-users of telecentre. Thus, far most research studies have primarily focused on direct and tangible impacts of telecentre on its users whilst impact on non-users is least covered and understood. Consequently, it was equally essential to study the concept of unquantifiable intangible impacts experienced by the non-users. Sen's "Capability Approach" (CA) was adopted to understand the impact of telecentre on human development. "The Most Significant Change" (MSC) was employed as a tool for collecting data in the form of stories from the telecentre users and non-users. The process involved gathering stories about the telecentre impact from the Bario community people. The MSC stories with significance relevance were identified and selected with the help of the community. Those were then analysed using the content analysis technique and Leximancer to identify the patterns of change experienced by the respondents. The results of the study on the whole suggests that the Bario community has benefited from the use of the telecentre, both directly and indirectly, including intangible impacts such as connectedness, a sense of belongingness, strengthened social ties, and psychological empowerment (self-esteem and self-efficacy). The theoretical approach together with methodological approach provided a base for understanding ways to conceptualize the development and determine the ways in which telecentre contributed directly or indirectly to the social and economic development of the community inhabitants.

KEYWORDS

intangible impact, ICTD, non-users, tangible impact, telecentre, users

1 | INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have long been recognized as tools for empowering people, especially in underserved rural communities in developing countries where they have been promoted through community telecentres (Aji, Mohd, Sheik Osman, & Yusop, 2010; Kwapong, 2007). However, gaining an understanding of how this occurs has not been straightforward. Young (2013) stated that despite investing millions of dollars on community networks to bridge the digital divide and its use, little insights are available about its impact. This raises the following questions: were the dollars allocated to community networks well spent? Was the digital divide bridged as a result of community networks funding? Did community networks contribute to the economic, social, political, and cultural development of communities? What lessons were learned, and can any of these lessons be applied to current initiatives designed to promote the development and use of ICTs? According to