

research on such topics as users' perceptions of the benefits of internet café use in Jordan; ICT job training in Rwanda; understanding user motivations and risk factors for overuse and internet addiction in China; the effect of technology use on social inclusion among low-income urban youth in Argentina; productive uses of technologies by grassroots organisations in Peru; use of technology by migrant ethnic minority Burmese women in Thailand to maintain ties with their culture and their family and friends; and women's limited access to the most ubiquitous type of venue, cybercafés, in practically all countries studied – and quite severely in some places, e.g., Uttar Pradesh, India.

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Chapter contents

In the introductory chapter, the editor Francisco J. Proenza presents the structure of the book and summarises key findings that public access has a positive impact on people's lives expanding networks and opportunities to communicate, exchange ideas and collaborate.

In the opening of Part I, dedicated to the analysis of the impact on personal achievement and well-being, the second chapter entitled "*User Perceptions of Impact of Internet Cafés in Amman, Jordan*" discusses results of a survey covering 336 users of 24 randomly selected cybercafés in Amman to identify that their use is considered positive in the areas of communications, social networking, improving education and learning and last but not least income and employment.

In chapter 3, entitled "*Impact of Public Access to ICT Skills on Job Prospects in Rwanda*", the authors conclude that the skills acquired from public access venues differ and affect job prospects differently depending on venue type, location, the competence of instructor, duration of the training, and sex of trainees.

In the fourth chapter on "*Personal Objectives and the Impact of Internet Cafés in China*", the authors perform a quantitative analysis among cybercafé users and nonusers and conclude that people use the internet and internet cafés not because of external pressures or rewards, but as part of their overall search to satisfy basic psychological needs.

Chapter 5, on "*Problematic Internet Use among Internet Café Users in China*", discusses evidence showing that internet addiction in China is not as widespread as is often reported in the media, and showcase features of users and use practices that seem to increase the risk of overuse.

The final chapter of part I, on "*Contribution of Five Télécentres Communautaires Polyvalents to Cameroon's Rural Secondary Education*", studies five rural communities of Cameroon, where télécentres communautaires polyvalents (TCPs) are the only places from which students can connect to the internet. Access to the internet gives mid- and upper secondary students a performance edge although there is some evidence suggesting that spending too much time at the TCP may compromise academic achievements.

Chapter 7, on “*The Appropriation of Computer and Internet Access by Low-Income Urban Youth in Argentina*”, opens part II of the volume dedicated to the analysis of facilitating inclusion and enabling the buildup of social capital. In this chapter, the authors investigate the potential role of internet cafés and community ICT training centres as hubs for enabling the social inclusion of youth in poor urban environments.

Chapter 8, on “*Impact of Public Access to Computers and the Internet on the Connectedness of Rural Malaysians*”, is based on 300 responses to an online survey on social connectedness among users of Malaysia’s 42 rural internet centres, to evaluate the degree of connection of rural Malaysians to their social networks.

In Chapter 9, on “*The Capacity-Enhancing Power of ICT: The Case of Rural Community-Based Organizations in the Peruvian Andes*”, the authors assess the impact of public access on the organisational capacity of nine grassroots organisations.

Part III of the volume, focused on the analysis of the impact on women, is opened up by chapter 10, on “*In Women and Cybercafés in Uttar Pradesh*”, discussing the limitations on access by women to cybercafés.

Chapter 11 that follows, on “*The Impact of Public Access to Telecenters: Social Appropriation of ICT by Chilean Women*”, suggests that the state should strengthen urban neighbourhood telecentres to better serve women’s needs, encourage greater participation of women, and help women develop digital skills, realise their aspirations, and meet their everyday needs.

Finally, Chapter 12, on “*Cybercafés and Community ICT Training Centers: Empowering Women Migrant Workers in Thailand*”, provides an assessment of the impact of public access on women migrants.

The concluding chapter and part of the volume, focused on public access impact and policy implications, provides an overview of the themes treated in this collective volume stressing that “*the overwhelming majority of users consider public access ICT to have impacted their lives positively, on personal achievement and well-being, and expanding networks and opportunities to communicate, exchange ideas and collaborate*”.

Significance for the state of research and practice

According to the 2012 Global Impact Study of Public Access to Information & Communication Technologies, community access to computer and internet technology is essential so as to connect people to the information and skills they need in an increasingly digital world (Sey et al., 2013).

Millions of people around the world rely on public access venues such as cybercafés, libraries, and telecentres for computer and internet access and services. These venues vary from private sector entities such as internet cafes to public areas such as the libraries and telecentres. For quite some time those public access venues were considered to be an intermediate stage to private access and that the use of cell phones would decrease their use.

Araba Sey, Information School research assistant professor and lead investigator of the Global Impact Study of Public Access to Information & Communication Technologies highlights that “*Many people in low- and middle-income countries, including the underemployed, women, rural residents and others who are often marginalized, derive great benefits in such areas as education, employment and health when they use computers and the Internet at public access venues*” (Kelley, 2013).

This is exactly the point that is discussed, highlighted and enriched with metrics and a big volume of data in the collective volume edited by Francisco J. Proenza. Ten research teams that worked between 2009 and 2012 across three continents under the auspices of the Amy Mahan Research Fellowship Program to Assess the Impact of Public Access to ICT performed the first systematic assessment of the impact of shared public access in the developing world, with findings from ten countries in South America, Asia, and Africa.

The quantitative and qualitative results of their work having as use cases examples in Jordan Rwanda China; Argentina; India, Peru and more enable a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the added value of internet cafés in cities and state-run telecentres in rural areas as places for a multifaceted civic participation in digital society that go far beyond the simple access to the internet.

Linking public access to ICT to the economic, cultural and social trends in the countries studied, the book takes a critical approach to current efforts for digital inclusion and empowerment of underserved population.

According to the authors, public access potentially can enable users to learn, communicate, enhance their skills, entertain themselves and the others, expand their social networks and build up social capital fighting all forms of exclusion and civic gaps.

Concluding the book is clearly well timed as public access is as important as ever not only as a mean of strengthening social and economic development efforts in developing countries via, enhancements of knowledge and skills, employability and equity but also because it can be considered as an opportunity for creating the “new social place of the era of digitalisation”, public spaces following the concept of “human information interaction”, which is a concept based on the relation between human, space, and information technologies of the era (Abdel-Aziz et al., 2016).

Significance for managers and instructors

Public access ICT is directly and indirectly relevant to development. Communities benefit when people can access information and communicate with experts and people in their social networks to learn about health, jobs, education, leisure activities, or whatever inspires them (Clark et al., 2012).

Therefore this is a crucial collective volume for students and researchers in politics, media, development and IT experts and also the general public interested in one of the key political and social question of our time: the relationship between media technology, public action and development.

Public officials, civil society actors, community leaders, community developers, and especially policymakers will find very useful and enlightening from both a theoretical but also practical perspective the analysis on issues such as promoting equity and strengthening females rights, improve knowledge and skills in ICT but also achieve public spaces upgrade, remodelling and modernisation.

On the one side according to Geldof (2011), males and females are different in terms of access and use of ICT in developing countries: males access ICT more frequently than females. There are also differences between males and females accessing public venues in developing countries. Males and females do not participate equally in public venues such as telephone-centres and internet cafés. Males visit internet cafés significantly more often than females (Wijaya and Polina, 2014).

On the other side, design of future public spaces to meet the needs of digital era users, using new concepts of social life and respecting the rules of place-making, presents ways of implementing ICT tools in public spaces to regain their status as attractive places for people, incite meetings in real life and create lively city centres (Abdel-Aziz et al., 2016).

Drawing evidence from ten countries and in different settings and using a wide angle of research methods, authors of this collective volume enrich the understanding of how contemporary digital communication technologies are contributing to new forms of civic development, of what are the challenges and the potential boundaries of such actions.

Finally, the volume opens new grounds for further research, firstly on reaching the marginalised population in developing countries and specific parts of these populations such as females and youth, and secondly on the potential power of public access ICT is as local regeneration and civic hubs enabler.

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