

Chapter 17

Mobile Services for Development: An Opportunity for Academic Co-Creation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the impact of mobile services in developing nations. It focuses on the opportunities for academic research to improve the services which contribute to the lives of citizens in the developing world and make progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. In many instances, the business models used in the developing economies serve to make the services more sustainable, and relieve some of the burden on governments which have traditionally been responsible for health, energy, sanitation, education and other basic services. This article also investigates the key role of co-creation in defining and developing the services that contribute to development. It concludes with a set of research challenges for furthering the progress towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals through the use of mobile technologies.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the impact of mobile services in developing nations. It focuses on the opportunities for academic research to improve the services which contribute to the lives of citizens in the developing world and make progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. We investigate the role of co-creation in the success or failure of development projects, and propose research challenges in the area of mobiles for development.

The exponential growth of mobile communication devices throughout the world has been noted by many authors (e.g. Mechal 2009, Nique & Smertnik 2015, UN 2015, Vital Wave 2009), and the opportunities to leverage this technology are evident in both developed economies and in the developing world. The UN Millennium Development Goals Report in 2015 states that:

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Mobile Services for Development

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have completely transformed the way people live, work and communicate. Their role and importance continue to expand thanks to technological progress, expanding networks, falling prices and growth in applications and content. For instance, the proportion of the population covered by a 2G mobile-cellular network grew from 58 per cent in 2001 to 95 per cent in 2015. The number of mobile-cellular subscriptions has grown almost tenfold in the last 15 years, from 738 million in 2000 to over 7 billion in 2015. Since 2002, the number of mobile-cellular subscriptions has exceeded the number of fixed telephone subscriptions.

The report goes on to state that:

Smartphones continue to become cheaper and more widespread. Their growing processing power supports the seamless delivery of services to an increasing number of people in every imaginable sector, including banking, retail trade, transport, health and education.

The goal of the paper is to understand the role of co-creation in the development and sustainability of mobile services for the developing economies, and to point out research opportunities for academic research in this area. The paper is organized into four main sections: the background to the issues surrounding the developing world as seen by the UN; the role of co-creation in working on the development goals; a set of examples taken from four important areas of development; and an analysis of research opportunities and directions.

BACKGROUND

The millennium development goals (MDGs) were set by the United Nations in 2000, with 21 specific targets in eight main categories for the year 2015. The categories are:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (3 targets).
2. Achieve universal primary education (1).
3. Promote gender equality and empower women (1).
4. Reduce child mortality (1).
5. Improve maternal health (2).
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (3).
7. Ensure environmental sustainability (4).
8. Develop a global partnership for development (6).

Many of the targets have been reached, and progress has been made in all of them. This chapter looks at the contribution that mobile communication technology and services have made, and will continue to make in achieving the sustainable development of society on our planet. It argues that co-creation is an important strategy for defining and maintaining services for development, since the most successful examples of mobile services were conceived, designed and co-created by heterogeneous groups of stakeholders.

The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945. It is currently made up of 193 Member States, each of which has made a commitment to pursuing the goals of sustainable development.

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