

Chapter 85

Domestication of Telecentres by Malawian Rural Women

Sellina Khumbo Kapondera

Mzuzu University, Mzuzu, Malawi & Royal Holloway University of London, London, UK

Wallace Chigona

Department of Information Systems, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

ABSTRACT

The potential of telecentres to bridge the digital divide can only be realised when their services are appropriated by all groups in the community. Previous studies show that in Malawi only a few women use telecentres. This article used Domestication Theory to explain the processes through which women in rural Malawi encounter technologies, deal with them and integrate them into their lives. Data was obtained via interviews with women (both users and non-users) and a Telecentre Manager. The study shows that: i) commodification was influenced mainly by word of mouth; ii) the women who appropriated the Telecentre used it for instrumental and hedonic purposes; iii) the appropriation was influenced by convenience, compatibility with the needs of women and perceived usefulness of the Telecentre; and iv) non-use was due to lack of awareness, illiteracy, limited financial resources, cultural roles and perceptions about the telecentres. The findings could help policymakers in maximising use of telecentres among women.

INTRODUCTION

Access and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have the potential to develop communities (Chisango, 2014). For instance, ICTs improve skills, enhance social life and offer economic opportunities (Chikumba, 2011). Despite the benefits of using ICTs, access to these ICTs is low in Malawi. In 2014, of the total 16 million people, only 5,590 people were broadband internet subscribers, while 6,487,304 were mobile phone subscribers (Nyirenda, 2014). As such, over the past two decades, just as in many developing countries, the government of Malawi, with aid from various international organisations, has been establishing telecentres (Chikumba, 2011). A Telecentre is a public facility of-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7297-9.ch085

fering access to ICT services for educational, social and economic purposes (Chisa & Hoskins, 2016). Telecentres offer access to ICT services such as the internet, phone, fax, computer and, sometimes, library services (Chisa & Hoskins, 2016).

The potential of telecentres to bridge the digital divide can only be realised when the services they provide are appropriated and used by all groups of people in the communities they serve. However, research studies in many developing countries show that usage of telecentres does not cross all categories of people. Specifically, only a few women, as compared to men, use the facilities (Chisango, 2014; Kumar & Best, 2007). In Malawi, previous studies on usage of telecentres show that only a few women use these facilities (for example, Kapondera & Hart, 2016). This paper focuses on domestication of telecentres by women in rural communities in Malawi. In this study, our concern is to understand the process through which telecentres are appropriated in women's lives in rural Malawi. Specifically, we ask the following questions:

- How do rural women in Malawi integrate telecentres in their lives?
- What influences the use or non-use of telecentres by rural women in Malawi?

This study contributes towards generating information aimed at helping ICT policymakers regarding domestication of telecentres by women in rural communities in Malawi. Domestication theory was used to guide the research in understanding how women adopt and integrate telecentres into their lives. Malawi is particularly interesting because there are limited studies on the use of ICTs in Malawi and Malawi is one of the countries with low technology uptake; it is interesting, therefore, to see how communities in that environment deal with technology. Domestication refers to the processes through which people encounter technologies and deal with them by either rejecting them or accepting and integrating them into their everyday lives (Haddon, 2006). The use of Domestication Theory allowed us to explore the adoption as a process and not as a binary phenomenon.

BACKGROUND

Malawi is classified as a low-income country (The World Bank, 2016). On the 2016 Human Development Index, the country is ranked as number 170 out of 185 countries (Human Development Report, 2016). The country has a population of 17.2 million and more than half of the population live on less than \$1 a day (Malawi, 2012). The majority (83.9%) live in rural areas (Human Development Report, 2016) which have few roads and means of transport, low income levels, limited access to ICTs and electricity, and high dependence on fishing and farming (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, 2017).

The ICT penetration level in Malawi is low and there are disparities in ICT access between urban and rural areas; the rural areas of Malawi have limited access. In 2014, of the 64,247 people who had access to fixed telephones, only 18.7% were from rural areas (Nyirenda, 2014, p. 7). The national survey on access to and usage of ICT services in Malawi in 2015 shows that in the rural areas only 42% of the households had access to mobile phones as compared to 85.1% of households in urban areas; in rural areas 30.6% of the population had access to mobile phones as compared to 71.8% in urban areas; only 13.9% of people in rural areas owned a computer device as compared to 36.1% in urban areas; and 2.9% of people in rural areas accessed the internet, while urban areas had 23.7% access (Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA, 2015).

14 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/domestication-of-telecentres-by-malawian-rural-women/270371

Related Content

The Transformative Potential of the Ongoing Digital Revolution for the Studio Model of Design Education

Paul David Hardman (2022). *Impact of Digital Transformation in Teacher Training Models* (pp. 160-177).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-transformative-potential-of-the-ongoing-digital-revolution-for-the-studio-model-of-design-education/298518

Digital Marketing and Digital Retail Strategies in the Luxury Sector: Critical Factors and Opportunities

Giuseppe Colella and Cesare Amatulli (2021). *Handbook of Research on IoT, Digital Transformation, and the Future of Global Marketing* (pp. 112-129).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/digital-marketing-and-digital-retail-strategies-in-the-luxury-sector/286272

Digitalization and the Rise of Green Finance: Opportunities, Challenges, and the Path Forward

Kaushikkumar Patel (2024). *Impact of Digitalization on Reporting, Tax Avoidance, Accounting, and Green Finance* (pp. 179-199).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/digitalization-and-the-rise-of-green-finance/343401

Mobile Technology: Simplifying Tourism Business Operations and Facilitating Tourists

Pramendra Singh (2022). *Disruptive Innovation and Emerging Technologies for Business Excellence in the Service Sector* (pp. 219-229).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/mobile-technology/300545

Internationalization Policies and Strategies From the Comparative Standpoint of Student Mobility in Slovenian and Turkish Higher Education

Maruša Hauptman Komotar and Tugba Elif Toprak-Yildiz (2022). *Digital Transformation and Internationalization Strategies in Organizations* (pp. 170-197).
www.irma-international.org/chapter/internationalization-policies-and-strategies-from-the-comparative-standpoint-of-student-mobility-in-slovenian-and-turkish-higher-education/290627